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And I walked out of the shop and left him there.—Page 53.

# PHOEBE, ERNEST, AND CUPID

By

INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE

Author of

*"Phoebe and Ernest," "Janey," etc.*

With Illustrations by

R. F. SCHABELITZ



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# PHOEBE, ERNEST, AND CUPID

## CHAPTER I

### ERNEST AND THE LAW OF ORDER

OUTSIDE a late September gale was tearing the landscape into shreds. The roads, carpeted with a sodden mat of fallen leaves, ran between yellow gutter-torrents. Most of the flower-plots on the Martin place looked as if they had been trampled. Only the sturdier blooms—asters and dahlias—arose to their full height after the wind-gusts had passed. The elms and maples, tortured into monstrous distortions of themselves, wrestled with the elements like human things.

The note of destruction seemed to be carried out in Ernest's room. A trunk gaped empty in the middle of the floor. About it lay books, papers, shoes, hats and caps. A confused mass of clothes hid the bed. All the wall decorations—trophies of his many sporting interests—were down. Ernest had left them in dusty heaps just where they fell. The paper of the high, gaunt walls showed faded spots, their exact shape. It was as if Ernest, emerging into manhood, were leaving the empty shell of his boyhood behind.

Mrs. Martin sank listlessly into the big chair and gazed about her. The storm outside and the storm inside seemed a mere echo of the tempest in her own heart. For Mrs. Martin's nerves were all on edge that morning. Just after breakfast, the arrival of Ernest's new trunk had seemed to put an extra, a poignant finish to the long fight which she had waged, single-handed.

In brief, the struggle had been with Ernest. And Ernest had won. He was leaving home in a week.

Mrs. Martin had always realized that the time would come when she must step down from her position as dictator of her children's lives, must hand the reins of government over to them. Her only complaint was that, to her, it had come prematurely. In Ernest's case, she had consciously watched the successive stages of his approach to manhood freedom. First, she had caught him shaving in secret. A little later, things had so fallen that it seemed wise to give him a latch-key—this, at least two years earlier than she had planned. Often now he spent his evenings away from home. Mrs. Martin never asked any questions about these nocturnal excursions. But she was glad that Ernest volunteered his brief curt account of them. In fact, she plumed herself on the composure with which she reconciled herself to these steps. She only hoped that the succeeding ones would come with an equal slowness and naturalness.

There was no reason to think they would not. They were planning to send Ernest to Harvard.

All the years that her son had been growing up, Mrs. Martin had been counting on those four years at Cambridge. She always thought happily of them as a little nest-egg tucked away in the bank of her happiness. When the time should come, she promised herself that she would spend it prodigally. Ernest would be a man and of course emancipate. But he would sleep at home. He would spend his Sundays and his holidays with his family. A long, wide road of content stretched four years ahead into Mrs. Martin's future. And then, suddenly, like the traditional bolt from the blue, the unforeseen happened.

Ernest had announced that he did not want to go to Harvard; he wanted to go to Princeton. His reason for this change in plan was vague. For a long time, he had been thinking that he would prefer one of the smaller colleges. The summer before, at Camp Hello, he had met Sandy Williston. Sandy was a sophomore at Princeton and a crackerjack. He had told Ernest a lot about his alma mater and the long and the short of it was that Ernest wanted to go there.

Mrs. Martin set herself against this scheme with all the intensity of her nature. And at first both Mr. Martin and Phoebe sided with her.

"It's out of the question, Ernest," Mr. Martin said. "You know that I've always wanted you to go to Harvard. Now don't bother me with it again."

"Well, Ern Martin," Phoebe said, "if you aren't

the *queer thing!* Why, you've talked Harvard to me until you were blue in the face. If you only knew the *thousands of times* I've lain awake nights planning your class-day spread!"

Ernest sulked for a week and Mrs. Martin thought the episode was closed. But apparently he re-opened the siege and this time in secret. For first Phoebe deserted with a:

"Well, mother, I was talking with Ern last night and, come to think of it, I don't see why he shouldn't do what he likes. Besides, with Tug at Harvard and Ern at Princeton, I'll have a pull at two colleges. And it would be perfectly dandy going up there to visit Ern—he says that Sandy says that the Princeton Inn is a *perfect pippin*. Ern says he'll do anything for me when I come on."

Phoebe's defection counted for little; Mrs. Martin fought on, calmly confident of victory. And then one night Ernest had a long talk with his father.

"Mother," Mr. Martin said to his wife after they went to bed, "I guess we've got to let Ernest go. After all, it's a thing he ought to settle for himself. We don't want to have him say later that we stood in the way of his doing the thing he most wanted to do." And at a panic-stricken remonstrance from Mrs. Martin, he added, "I must say, Bertha, I don't see why you hold out so. You certainly put it up to me all right when it was a question of Phoebe's going to Europe. The truth of the matter is, the boy's tied too close to your



apron-strings. He doesn't *say* it's that. He doesn't *know* it's that. But that's the whole thing in a nutshell."

Tied to her apron-strings! Mrs. Martin had never realized in full the ignominy of that insulting phrase. She did not sleep all night. And in the morning she said, "Ernest, if your heart is set on going to Princeton, I have no further objection to offer."

"Well, you see that it doesn't happen again—that's all!" This was Ernest's voice.

"Well, you bettah quit a-talking dat-away to me or Ah'll jess natchally——" This was Flora's voice.

Mrs. Martin started out of her preoccupation and listened. What she heard brought her, almost on a run, to the door. There, she listened again. It was unmistakable—the sounds coming from the kitchen were of strife, not merriment.

"Ernie!" she called peremptorily. "Come up here this minute. I want to speak to you."

"All right." Ernest's tone was that of a sulky acquiescence. But when, an instant later, he came leaping up the stairs, the fire of an active wrath still burned in his eyes.

"What is it this time?" his mother asked sternly.

"It's the way that dinge does my bed, mother. I've been giving her ballyhoo for it. She either tucks the clothes in too loose so that they all come out at the foot and I never *can* get them back, or

she tucks them in so far that there's nothing to come up around my neck. I never saw such a fool-coon in my life. I wish you'd fire her—she's no good."

"Ernie," Mrs. Martin said desperately, "don't you say another word to Flora until I give you permission. If she should leave me in the lurch with your Uncle Paul and your Aunt Susie coming for over Sunday—— If you have any fault to find with her, tell me and I'll see that it's remedied. I wouldn't lose Flora for a farm down east. She's the best girl I ever had."

"She's too fresh," Ernest growled.

"That's only because you're so saucy to her. How many times, Ernie, have I told you that you ought to show more consideration to servants? The way things are in this world, they're placed in a very disagreeable position. You go down there and rile them all up. And yet no matter what you say or how mad they get, they can't answer back. For they know, if I overhear it, I've got to discharge them. That's why you should never get into a quarrel with them, no matter what they do. It's cowardly—you're hitting somebody weaker than yourself. I don't know how I'm ever going to teach you that, for I don't believe there's a week of your life gone by that I haven't said this very same thing to you."

"Well, I guess I'm not going to take any back talk from a great fat smoke like Flora. If she was a man, I'd hand her the swiftest wallop she ever

got. Ever since she won that fifty cents off me on the prize-fight, she thinks she's made. I bet you Williams don't keep the championship two years. When did he ever go up against a first-class pug, anyway?"

"That will do, Ernie. And don't you mention that prize-fight again. I am sick and tired of the sound of the name. And remember I shall punish you severely if you get into any more trouble with Flora."

At the harshness of his mother's tone, Ernest looked at her in surprise. And with the entrance into her admonition of "punish you severely," a phrase long extinct from family discipline, he emitted a low whistle. He changed it into the opening bars of the "Villikins and his Dinah" and he made a great pretense of indifference as he turned away.

Mrs. Martin fell back into her reverie. Ernest was not as competent as a baby to take care of himself. The disturbance that she had just quelled illustrated one of his crotchets perfectly. He had absolutely no capacity for getting along with servants. Phoebe, much more diplomatic, always managed to keep on the right side of them. But Ernest—Mrs. Martin had tried American, Irish, African, Swede—there had been one ghastly week in which an Italian reigned in the kitchen. The result was always the same. Ernest immediately started on the war-path. It was not so much that he stole pies, cakes, cookies, jellies, preserves. It was not even

that he brought hordes of boys into the house to track mud over stainless kitchen floors. It was more that he eternally *argued* with them. And when Ernest started an argument—unconsciously Mrs. Martin's figure slumped in her chair.

Mrs. Martin tried to picture Ernest in a strange boarding house, surrounded by strange people, ministered to by strange servants. Well, she knew what would happen. There would be a row and that was all there was to it. And she or Mr. Martin would have to go on to patch it up.

“Ern! Ern!”

It was Phoebe calling. And there was that note in her voice which brought Mrs. Martin out of her meditation and impelled her to listen—to listen with the air of one slightly on the defensive. It was one thing for her to criticize Ernest and another thing for anybody else to do it. The son and heir of the Martin family could always be sure of one champion in it.

“*Ern Martin!*” Phoebe's voice had an inflection positively dangerous.

“Oh, what is it?” came Ernest's sulky tones.

“Ern Martin, if you ever again leave the bathroom looking the way it does now when I'm expecting company, I'll—I'll—well, I don't know *what* I will do. But it will be something you'll remember. If Sylvia Gordon had happened to glance in it, I should have *sunk to the ground*. It looks like a bird-cage after the canary's taken a bath. The ceil-

ing's the only thing that isn't splashed! And towels—and wash-rags—and sponges——”

The last words came in jerks. Mrs. Martin visualized Phoebe's lithe stoopings, her curling nostril, as she picked these messy articles up.

“——and as for the tub——well, I'd be ashamed to let people know I could *get* so dirty. When I think that, somewhere in the world, Ern Martin, there's a poor helpless female growing up that's going to draw you for a husband, I pity her more than *tongue can tell*. That mutt of a patient Griselda that we studied in Chaucer won't be a circumstance to her. With mother Martin working her hands to the bone getting you ready for college, I should think——”

“Oh, dry up!” came in wrathful explosion from Ernest. His door slammed.

But, undiscouraged, Phoebe kept on, sure of one listener. “My goodness, I hope when I get married, all my children will be girls. Boys like to be dirty—they aren't *comfortable* clean. They ought to be chained in sties or kennels until they're about eighteen. Then perhaps decent people would live with them.”

“I was just about to say, Phoebe,” Mrs. Martin made crisp interruption of this flow of eloquence, “that if you pick up the floor of your closet and tidy up your top bureau drawer, I'll listen with more interest to what you've got to say about Ernie.”

But although Mrs. Martin rebuked Phoebe so sharply, this second incident allied itself as disturb-

ingly as the first with the pessimistic trend of her reverie. It intensified her conviction that Ernest could not cope, single-handed, with the outside world.

She considered that in some ways she had not had so much to contend with in her son as most mothers. Personal cleanliness, for instance. Not that, as a little fellow, Ernest had enjoyed bathing more than any other boy. In his childhood, she had to exercise an unending surveillance over his hair, his teeth, his finger-nails. But his passion for athletics had helped to supplement her instructions. At the gym, he acquired the shower-bath habit. And after that, the daily cold plunge followed as a matter of course. As for clothes—his first girl-interest aroused plenty of sartorial enthusiasm. Mrs. Martin never had to speak to him again about clean collars, fresh handkerchiefs, polished shoes. No, when it came to his appearance, Mrs. Martin had absolutely no worries. But on the other hand Ernest's carelessness—his heedlessness, his mother preferred to call it—was colossal, epic, unbelievable.

Ernest never shut a door, a drawer, or a box; he never put anything back in its place; he always put it down wherever he happened to be. In changing his clothes, he dropped discarded articles in his tracks. He had a capacity for walking over things, of stumbling into things, of knocking things off and pushing things over, that amounted to a very genius of destruction. It was almost as if the whole world of matter were in collusion against him, as if, at his approach, all natural laws repudiated their

functions. The attraction of gravity, for instance, either stopped entirely, thereby permitting inanimate objects to take wings and fly through the air; or it became trebly powerful and pulled things off their resting-places on to the floor. His progress through the house was as devastating as a prairie fire. As for his room—— He was as little indoors as any active boy, but three times a day Mrs. Martin recreated system from the wreckage there.

No more mentally than physically had Ernest adjusted himself to the world in which he lived. Telegrams or letters that he sent never arrived, theater-tickets that he bought always bore the wrong dates, money lost itself out of his pockets. As for errands—it was like sending an idiot boy. He always came home with something, but never with the thing for which he had gone.

What would he do all alone at college?

Yet he wanted—there was the jab of it—he *wanted* to go away from home. Ernest did not realize that she had been a good mother. He was not even grateful for her care.

In point of fact, the unanalytic and inarticulate Ernest had never consciously considered the matter. He took as a matter of course the yearning, hovering, brooding solicitude with which his mother invested every move of his existence.

“No matter what time of night I come in,” he used to say, “I always find her waiting at the top of the stairs to talk with me. She’s like a well-trained fire-horse: When I put my key in the lock,



that rings gong number one and she comes out of the stall. When I open the door, that rings gong number two and the harness drops on her back. When I put my foot on the first stair, that rings gong number three and off she trots to the fire—meaning me. Why, one night when I went to bed, it was so hot that I left my windows all wide open. In the middle of the night, I waked up out of a sound sleep and there was Mrs. Edward D. Martin putting the windows down because it was raining. Later I woke up about half-melted and opened them all again. When I got up in the morning, there they were, all shut but one. Mother had come in before sunrise for fear I'd freeze to death."

Mrs. Martin always laughed when he told these jokes on her—laughed with a pleased, proud sense of his appreciation of the love behind them. But after all they were only jokes to Ernest. He did not like that care. He wanted to get away from it. Mrs. Martin suddenly thought back to her girlhood and her own dead mother. A mist came over her eyes. "I wonder if I appreciated her as much as I should?" she asked herself.

She had tried her best to teach him system, to teach him order, but it was like preaching to a waterfall. He never had learned. He never would learn. And yet she had done the best she could. Why had she failed? But what was the use of going over it: the matter was now quite out of her hands?

She heaved a great sigh. Opening the door, she

called to her son: "Come down, Ernie. It's time you began to pack your trunk."

"I don't know what's got into me," she thought in the interval while she waited for him, "I don't seem to have any more get-up-and-get than a sick cat. Perhaps I've been working too hard. I'll try to rest up after Ernie's gone."

But Mrs. Martin did not "rest up" after Ernest left, although, physically, she was idle enough. A great silence seemed to fall upon her. It was as if the house were but an empty, echoing stage, Phoebe's gay gossip but the chorus to some wonderful lost drama. The days went by, one like another. Regularly three times a week she wrote to Ernest; long, rambling, gentle epistles, saturated with affection and bristling with questions. Regularly once a week came Ernest's brief answering scrawl in which a maximum of general statements diffused a minimum of concrete information. Ernest expected to "make end" on the freshman football team. The big game with Yale would come somewhere in November. But at no time had Ernest's athletics interested his mother as much as they worried her. And now she read with indifference the news that Mr. Martin and Phoebe discussed eternally. She was much more interested in the "horsing" to which his first few days subjected him—interested because, inwardly, she boiled with indignation over what her husband and daughter went into peals of laughter. And all these events gained a puzzling and irritating suggestion of remoteness from the fact that Ernest

had picked up a new vocabulary. With her usual adaptability, Phoebe immediately adopted these quaint exotics of the Princeton campus. But, curiously enough, though in Phoebe's speech, Mrs. Martin did not mind such nouns as "shark," or "poler," or "pepp," such verbs as "to flunk" and "to gloom," it gave her a homesick feeling to come upon them in Ernest's letters. The single high light in the whole situation was Ernest's class picture, although she resented bitterly the obscuring shower of flour to which the upper classmen had submitted the group. No, Ernest's letters were far from satisfactory to his mother. A week passed and two and three, a month—and over.

"Bertha, what is the matter with you?" Mr. Martin said more than once. "You don't seem to have any sprawl to you. For one thing, you don't eat enough to keep a bird alive."

"Oh, nothing's the matter with me, Edward," Mrs. Martin would answer. "I got a little tired getting Ernie ready. I shall pick up after a while."

But she did not pick up. In fact she ate little and slept less. She got whiter and thinner. And she, who had been the most busy of women, fell into the habit of sitting for hours, empty-handed, staring vaguely into the fire or out the window.

"Bertha," Mr. Martin said peremptorily one night, "you put on your things the moment we've had dinner. I've had enough of this foolishness. I'm going to take you to Dr. Bush and see what's the matter."



“No, I tell you what let’s do, father—we’ll send mother on to Princeton to visit Ern. There’s a beautiful hotel there. Now, mother, don’t say another word, for you’re going.”



"I know what's the matter," Phoebe said in the clarion tones of one of her sudden discoveries, "she wants to see Ern Martin. Oh, yes, you do, mother," she continued trenchantly as her mother started to speak, "you're just dying of homesickness for him. She's afraid he's starving to death, father. Just as if Ern Martin would go hungry if there was any food round he could *steal*."

"Well, we'll send for Ernest, then," Mr. Martin said after a long moment, when with pursed lips and furrowed brow he studied his wife's listless face.

"No, it won't do any good to send for him," Phoebe said with another of her rare illuminations. "He'll be restless and go peeving round all the time and then mother'll begin to sacrifice herself again. No, I tell you what let's do, father—we'll send mother on to Princeton to visit Ern. There's a beautiful hotel there. Now, mother, don't say another word, for you're going."

"But what will you and your father do?" Mrs. Martin managed to get in.

"Do!" Phoebe answered with a robust buoyancy, "why, do *without*! I guess I can make a stagger at running this house. And I guess father won't come down with locomotor ataxia or anything like it if he happens to come home one night to a bad dinner after twenty-odd years of good ones. In fact, I announce now, Mr. Martin, that it will be your privilege to take your daughter twice a week into the Touraine. Now don't get scared, mother. Everything will go all right. And don't you say

a word to me about red-flannel hash or minced lamb on toast—there's going to be no *economizing* while I run the house. We'll have *terrapiu* if I take it into my head—although I never can remember whether it's a squab or some kind of classy fish."

Mr. Martin seemed instinctively to realize who was the young Napoleon of this domestic crisis. "Your mother ought to have some new clothes, oughtn't she?"

"I was just about to say, father," Phoebe offered serenely, "that we ought not to let mother go up there, looking like a *back number*. There's a sale on this week at Hazen's of French suits—all models. And I think we ought to go in to-morrow and get one—that'll save fussing with a dressmaker. Then I want her to have a nice feather-boa—it's too early for furs. Her new hat's all right. I guess a hundred dollars will cover it."

Mrs. Martin gasped. "Oh, Edward, it won't be as expensive as that."

"Mother," Phoebe said severely, "Ernest has been meeting a whole lot of boys' mothers, and I'm not going to have him thinking his mother doesn't know *what's what*."

That night Phoebe despatched the following note to her brother:

DEAR ERN:

Mother is coming on Monday to spend a week with you. It is just as I thought. She is simply dying by inches because she misses you so. And if you don't give

her *the time of her life*, it's because you're the limit. I hope I never grow as fond of any son of mine as Mother Martin is of you.

Aff'ly,

PHOEBE.

P.S.—You are no worse than any other boy. But the best of them are *none too good*. P.

What was the immediate and exact psychological effect of that letter is a part of unwritten history. But as soon as the mail could bring it, Mrs. Martin received the following:

DEAR MOTHER:

Phoebe says you're coming on for a week. Good for you! Better make it a month, for the change will do you good. We'll paint the town red.

Your loving son,

ERNEST MARTIN.

P.S.—Will you bring on to me that box that I packed and put in the attic. There's clothes and a whole lot of truck in it that I need.

2 P.S.—Ask Flora to send on one of her apple pies. Tell her she can put it all over anybody here on cooking. We've broken training and I can eat anything. It's the only consolation I've got. When I see you I'll tell you how we happened to lose.

Ordinarily there was nothing in the world that Mrs. Martin dreaded so much as a railroad journey alone. But as the limited pulled out of the South



Station in Boston, she was conscious of the first loosening from her spirit of its great burden. With every mile some of her tension vanished. Her burning desire to reach Princeton seemed to dissipate all the embarrassments and all the annoyances of travel. Not that she was not prepared to cope with them. In her hand-bag was a list of directions in the dashing chirography of her traveled daughter. It ran something like this:

Go into dining-room at *first* call for luncheon—the food is better then.

Tip waiter twenty-five cents. It is too much, but they'll treat you like *the dust under their feet* if you don't.

Get red-cap at Grand Central to take your bag. Tip him ten cents.

Take Pennsylvania Cab. Get red-cap at, etc.

By the middle of the afternoon, Mrs. Martin was in the paradoxical condition of one who acquires a sense of increasing mental repose parallel with increasing physical fatigue. And when at the end of the day, her eye fell on Ernest, standing in the station and eagerly running his eye up and down the length of the train, a heavy inner something seemed to burst, seemed to release another something that soared and fluttered with joy. But none of this appeared in her face as she scrutinized her son.

Ernest had changed. How, she could not determine. At first she thought it was because of his

absurd little freshman cap. Next she made up her mind that he was taller, then thinner. But after all, she decided finally, it was the way he held his head. He was tanned. His expression was not the same. Clear-eyed, facile-featured, smiling, all the mists of his sulky discontent had vanished.

His self-possession positively staggered her. He kissed her with what was for Ernest shameless openness. He flagged one expressman, ordered him to take the box to his room, flagged another, ordered him to take Mrs. Martin's trunk to the carriage which he had in waiting, handed his mother into that vehicle and ordered the driver to "beat it" to the Princeton Inn.

There, he had engaged a comfortable room and bath, overlooking a green vista of the pretty town.

"Say, Mrs. Martin," he remarked suddenly, "that new suit is a pippin. Haven't I always told you you were a looker! I've met a lot of the fellers' mothers and there isn't one of them that's a marker for you."

Ernest dined with his mother that night. He spent that evening with her. The next morning he breakfasted with her. The following noon he lunched with her. And between dinner and his departure, he told her all the things that his letter had left out and, between breakfast and lunch, he piloted her all over the town. Mrs. Martin went patiently from one beautiful ivy-hung gray building to another. She lingered in old Nassau long enough to satisfy even Ernest. Nobody could have guessed

from her calm demeanor that mentally she boiled. For it seemed to her that the time to visit Ernest's room would never come. When at length they left the Inn, Mrs. Martin carried a bundle. The absorbed Ernest, still talking at an impassioned pace, did not notice it. Mrs. Martin was glad of that. She hated to confess to him that, unbeknown to Phoebe, she had tucked into her trunk an old morning-dress and a cake of kitchen soap. For it was her intention, the moment she got behind locked doors in Ernest's room, to clean it up. Experience had taught her what the bureau drawers would be like. And as for the closet, Mrs. Martin shuddered. It was even possible that she would have to do some washing for him.

The house, a comfortable-looking cottage, much gabled and bay-windowed, was one of many that, Ernest explained, were all given over to dormitory purposes. As they entered, a woman emerged from a downstairs room.

"This is Miss Head, mother," Ernest said, "my mother, Mrs. Martin, Miss Head."

Mrs. Martin braced herself for the long string of complaints that Miss Head would present. But that lady, a stern-faced, black-mustached spinster, only smiled pleasantly and murmured conventional words of welcome.

"She's awfully good when you're sick or anything," Ernest explained in a stage-whisper on the stairs. "Gee, but ain't she the strict one, though! Most of the fellows are afraid of their life of her."

Now look out for this top step, mother. Everybody stumbles here—they always think there's one more. I'll open the door in a jiff, then there'll be light enough."

Mrs. Martin heard him fumbling with the key. Again she shivered inwardly. How she dreaded that first sight of Ernest's room!

The door swung back. A great blaze of light illumined the dark hall. Dazzled she stepped through the doorway. Gradually her eyes accustomed themselves to the light. She gazed about her.

The room was large, airy, sunny. In itself, it was furnished with almost a military simplicity—and it was in perfect order! The bureau drawers were all closed. The top of the chiffonier held Ernest's few toilet articles, neatly disposed. The closet door was ajar. Through it she caught glimpses of his clothes neatly suspended on hangers from a long central rod.

"Sit there, mother!" Ernest commanded, pulling the Morris chair out of the sunlight. "If you don't mind, I'm going to unpack the box you brought on so's to get it out of the way—I haven't had time yet."

Mrs. Martin sat down mechanically. And mechanically she watched her son.

Ernest materialized a hammer and screw-driver from somewhere and attacked the box. For an hour he whipped about the room, reducing confusion to order. As soon as anything came out of the box that belonged in the bureau, it was folded and added

to one of the neat piles in the drawers. As soon as anything came out that belonged in the closet, he shook and brushed it, placed it on a hanger, annexed it to the orderly file in the closet.

"I put everything away as fast as I take it off now, mother," he explained; "I find that's the only way to keep things shipshape here. Besides, it saves Miss Head doing it. Some of the fellows leave everything about. Maybe they don't catch it, though, when they do!"

He pushed the empty box inside the closet. He gathered up every shred of the tissue paper that Mrs. Martin had used for wrapping and threw it into the waste basket. He brought in a little dustpan from the hall and brushed up the splinters and excelsior.

"I'm going to make you a cup of chocolate now," he announced.

From a little curtained shelf, he brought out a tiny alcohol lamp, a tin of chocolate, a box of crackers.

"I make some every afternoon for myself ever since we broke training—I get so hungry. You know how I used to buy cakes and pies and all kinds of baker's truck. Well, Sandy Williston told me there was nothing to that. And he got me to buy this alcohol lamp. He's got one like it."

After they had drunk the chocolate, Ernest washed the dishes and put them away. During the process, he again relapsed into autobiography. "You see, mother, when I first came here, I used

to be awful careless about making extra work for Miss Head. And then she spoke to me once or twice about it, and I made up my mind it was my play to be more careful. You see, she does every bit of the chamberwork in this place, and I tell you she has to hustle. And then there was something I read in 'Don Quixote' about that time that I thought was great. Cervantes says that one test of a gentleman is the way he treats servants or any person who's placed in an inferior position. He says it's all an accident of birth, anyway; they might be in our place or we in theirs, and it's up to us to treat them with peculiar consideration from the very fact that they can't complain. If you speak harshly to a servant, it's exactly as if you hit somebody whose arms are tied behind him. Don't you think that's a remarkable way of putting it? I never saw it quite in that light before."

Mrs. Martin did not answer. She only stared.

His dish-washing over, Ernest got out of his jersey. Talking all the time, he bustled in and out, gathering things to take to the bathroom. And he continued to shout to her over the din of the running water and the splash of his bathing. Mrs. Martin listened in silence. Outside twilight settled.

Suddenly the room blazed white. Ernest, returning, all dressed, had snapped a white thread of flame into the electric bulb. "Gee, I forgot to light up for you," he said apologetically.

Mrs. Martin watched him intently as he walked over to the chiffonier. He looked at himself in the

mirror there, laughed, bounded suddenly over to his mother's side and knelt at her feet.

"Mother," he said, presenting her with a comb, "I'm glad you're here for more reasons than I can count. But one very particular one is that now my hair will be parted straight. I wish you could see the crazy way I do it. I go by my nose and my nose is crooked. I bet when I'm ninety I'll still be running to you to do it for me."

He dropped his head. But as his mother did not speak, he raised it. "Why, mother," he said in alarm, "what's the matter?"

"Oh, Ernie!" Mrs. Martin said, "oh, Ernie! I see now I'm a very selfish woman for being so rebellious about your coming here. It wasn't that I didn't want you to go away from home. I see that now. Way down in my secret heart, I wanted to keep you dependent on me. But you're a man now. I can't ever do anything more for you. And I'm glad. But I guess in the future you'll have to take care of me."

Perhaps Ernest's first long stay away from home had taught him something of his mother's heart. At any rate, he kissed her with a tenderness he had never before shown. And he continued to pat her gently as she wept out on his shoulder the tears that healed the bruise of his absence.

## CHAPTER II

### PHOEBE AND THE LITTLE BLIND GOD

**F**ROM Thanksgiving to Christmas of the year that Ernest went to college was a very happy month for Mrs. Martin. Her week's visit to Princeton, midway in November, had dissipated her great fear that her son was incapable of taking care of himself. She came back refreshed in body and triumphant in spirit.

In the meantime, Phoebe's solitary week of house-keeping seemed to have established the house as a rendezvous for the young people of Maywood. And, indeed, the social tide had been setting in their direction for a long time. It was not occasional formal entertaining, so much as constant impromptu hospitality, that had accomplished this for the Martins. Nobody enjoyed it more than Mrs. Martin; except perhaps Mr. Martin, who visibly grew younger in this seething flood of gayety.

But Mrs. Martin was one who enjoyed the calms of life with a weather-eye always open for its storms. And so, perhaps, she was the quietest of them all when the expected unexpected happened. Two days after Christmas, Phoebe stepped from Tug's automobile just as he started down the drive. She landed on her feet, but in a queer twisted heap. She arose



immediately. At the first step, however, she turned pale. At the second she swayed. And when the alarmed Tug sprang to her side, she fainted quietly in his arms.

Dr. Bush pronounced the case compound fracture of the ankle. "And it all depends on how quiet you keep whether you walk at the end of one month or three," he said.

Phoebe took the prospect of imprisonment with the philosophic fortitude which, in view of her beating energy, was always so great a surprise to her mother. She affected to find its greatest deprivation her inability to wear the high-heeled footwear that had always been her passion and to which Dr. Bush imputed the whole accident.

"You'll wear heelless slippers for one month after you get up, young woman," he scolded, "and if I have my way, you'll never put on another pair of those high-heel abominations again."

It was a day or two after the accident that Professor Hazeltine called. Into the feverish atmosphere of a house gradually adjusting itself to the abnormal, he brought quiet and calm. Both Mr. and Mrs. Martin were favorably impressed with him. Indeed, that very evening he gave them all their first care-free moment in a semi-jocose lecture on the vari-colored gems, both precious and semi-precious, which it was his pleasure to carry, unset, in his pocket.

The letter of introduction which he bore from Power Tyler, a classmate of Mr. Martin's at Har-

vard, stated that he was a professor at the University of Winona, an authority on romance languages and literatures, and author of two able monographs. A supplementary and more gossipy letter volunteered the information that he was a person of great social charm, that the "squaws" (Winona was co-educational) invariably fell in love with him, that in addition to his salary, he was a person of modest private means. He had come East to spend his sabbatical year in research work, partly at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and partly at Cambridge, England.

The visit which Mrs. Martin immediately asked him to make stretched, at her own request, from over Sunday to a week, from ten days to a fortnight. Professor Hazeltine steadily reinforced their first impression of him. It seemed that he was equally pleased with them; for, before his hosts could again lengthen his visit, he himself proposed that he stay on for a month or two as a "paying guest." This proposition affronted every hospitable instinct of the Martin family. But Professor Hazeltine threatened to leave if some such self-respecting arrangement were not made immediately.

"I'd really admire to have him here," Mrs. Martin said to Mr. Martin. "The house has been so quiet with Phoebe laid up, I declare it seems good to hear laughing and talking once more."

"I don't see the slightest objection to it," Mr. Martin answered, "as long as you're pleased. And then again, it isn't as if we were taking him in per-

manently. It'll only be a month or two . . . if he's going abroad in the spring."

Phoebe was the only one to object to this plan.

"Of course he's an interesting talker and all that sort of thing," she said. "But I think he's awfully *high-brow*. It seems to me to be *pretty pokey* to have him round all the time."

"Well," Mrs. Martin said, "I look at it in this way. Of course everybody's calling on you now because they're so sorry for you. But that's bound to let up after a while. There'll be plenty of nights—you mark my words—when they'll have other engagements. It will be real pleasant, I think, to have somebody as entertaining as Professor Hazeltine around. You haven't really talked with him yet, Phoebe. I consider he's a very gifted man—and such perfect manners, so quiet and self-effacing."

"Oh, he's clever enough," Phoebe assented. "He's a perfect shark when it comes to the languages. But I don't think he's so very *self-effacing*. Not that he asserts himself, either. But, if you notice, when people meet him they don't seem to pay the slightest attention to him at first. It's almost as if he wasn't there. Then all of a sudden he's there *with a capital T* and they all seem to get on to the fact that he's somebody."

"It's because he's so short," Mrs. Martin said. "It's a dreadful pity he wasn't an inch or two taller. And yet I don't know as that's it, after all. I never saw a short man with so much presence. Somehow you always think of him as tall. He

carries himself just as if he was a giant. I guess he's got what people call *personality*. I'm surprised at you, Phoebe, for not enjoying him more."

"Well, mother," Phoebe said analytically, "it's a curious thing about me. I don't like boys *at all* and yet men over twenty-five—or twenty-eight, maybe—don't interest me so very much, either. I think life's a very queer thing. I don't see what there is to live for after you're thirty. Did you notice any difference, mother?"

Mrs. Martin reflected, the wrinkle in her brow playing free. "Well, I've always been so busy," she answered without conscious sarcasm, "that I declare it's never entered my head to think of it."

"Well, it has entered mine," Phoebe said darkly. "I think of it *all the time*. I've just about made up my mind that everybody ought to commit suicide on his thirtieth birthday."

The following day Professor Hazeltine came to the Martin house for good. For a week, however, the Martins saw almost nothing of him; he was too busy following up various social and academic affiliations. Dinner-parties seemed to take up all his evenings, dinner calls all his afternoons. In the meantime, Mrs. Martin found herself constantly praising him to her disdainful daughter. Then, suddenly, her prophecy in regard to him fulfilled itself. The annual dance of the Maywood High School swept away all the young people. An evening of complete loneliness threatened Phoebe. In desperation, she opened her first real conversation with their

guest. Beginning loftily with the Florence which she professed to "adore," it went to the Siena which she affected to deprecate—and stayed there for the rest of the evening. Professor Hazeltine had specialized in Sienese history and art.

"He is an interesting man," Phoebe said that night after her father carried her up to her room, and while her mother still lingered, getting her ready for the night. "There's no doubt about that. And the way he's worked! And he makes the most of *every little thing*. Why, I'd got the idea that he had lived abroad for long spells at a time. But it seems he hasn't. I pinned him down to-night and he admitted that he'd only been once—his last sabbatical year, seven years ago. But you see he was all loaded up with facts before he went. Why, it seems to me as if I hadn't seen a thing that was really worth while, when I listen to him. I think he's quite good-looking, too, when he gets warmed up. How old should you say he was, mother?"

"Well, it's hard telling," Mrs. Martin replied cautiously. "I wouldn't be surprised if he looked a great deal younger than he really was. You see, he isn't gray or bald and he keeps himself clean-shaven. His figure is very youthful, too, and he dresses—he always looks as if he'd come out of the top drawer. I never saw a man have so much laundry."

"I love his ties," Phoebe interjected, "and his scarfpins are in perfect taste. Isn't that green jade a dandy?"

"He doesn't look a day over forty and yet his neck is quite old. That's why he wears his hair a little long. I shouldn't be surprised," Mrs. Martin concluded, "if he was between forty-five and fifty."

"Dear me, that's almost venerable, isn't it?" Phoebe said pityingly. "Mother, will you let Flora go down to the Library for me to-morrow?"

"Of course," Mrs. Martin said heartily. She observed with approval that the list of books which Phoebe handed her the next day related entirely to Italian history. And that afternoon, when she returned from a committee meeting, she was delighted to find Professor Hazeltine talking with Phoebe again. Mrs. Martin had never seen her daughter look more pretty. Restless movement of her head among the couch-cushions had frayed her gold-flecked brown hair into a fringe that ran down her forehead, sprayed over her ears, and made little whorls and spirals and claws of light in her neck. This confusion of hair reduced her aspect, lately grown so young-ladylike, almost to childhood.

Professor Hazeltine was similarly transformed.

He was a man who, on snap-judgment, Mrs. Martin would have described as ordinary-looking. At first glance, his pale, pasty, pear-shaped face seemed but an insignificant pendant to a shock of darkish-drab hair, his small irregular features but spots of contour that accented a general weakness of composition. But when he talked—as now—this impression wore away. A white-hot interior fire

burned through these neutral surfaces. The determined, slit-like mouth showed his fine white teeth in a frequent pleasantly-flashing smile. His eyes, indeterminately yellow or gray and normally dull, positively gleamed.

"Oh, mother, what do you think!" Phoebe greeted her, "Professor Hazeltine has offered to teach me Italian. He says it's a *perfect snap* for anybody who's had Latin. And then, later, if I feel like it, we're going to take up Dante. Isn't that the greatest fun?"

"I think it will be lovely," Mrs. Martin said cordially. "Professor Hazeltine, I can't tell you how obliged Mr. Martin and I are for the trouble you've taken to amuse our little girl."

"Dear lady," Professor Hazeltine said gallantly, "far from being a trouble, it's a pleasure—I assure you."

Professor Hazeltine ordered the necessary books by telephone that very afternoon. In a day or two the lessons were well under way. Phoebe fell upon this new mental exercise with the energy of a being whose physical powers are in temporary inhibition. She studied as she had never studied before. Their work fell into the program that Professor Hazeltine's hours demanded. Before leaving in the morning, he gave Phoebe a lesson. During the middle of the day, Phoebe toiled alone at her exercises and translations. Late in the afternoon, Professor Hazeltine went over her work with her. Professor Hazeltine peremptorily forbade any study at night,

after a day so concentrated. And so, the more to fill his pupil's vacant hours, he inducted her into the mysteries of chess. The Italian lessons demanded so many books and so much elbow-room that merely for the sake of convenience teacher and pupil repaired to the big ping-pong table in the Playroom. Later, as they found alien conversation distracting, chess-games were also removed thither.

"How kind Professor Hazeltine is," Mrs. Martin iterated and reiterated to Mr. Martin.

And yet at the same time she admitted to herself first and to her husband last that she did not enjoy Professor Hazeltine quite so much, now that their relations were financial. As was natural, he had become more independent. But in addition, his attitude had acquired a subtle air of domination. "He has what I call Sunday manners," Mrs. Martin said, "and he doesn't put them on for everybody. He's not a snob exactly. Because it isn't the money that people have that makes the difference, it's more whether they're smart or not. I don't mean that exactly——" Mrs. Martin, beating helplessly about in the mazes of an alien psychology, hesitated, and came to a full stop.

"He's an intellectual snob." Mr. Martin's greater verbal equipment supplied the phrase. "No, I don't enjoy him so much as I did. Sometimes I think his manner is quite offensive to people who drop in. I confess if it wasn't making it so much easier for Phoebe I don't think I'd have him in the house any longer. But then it's only a month more."



"It doesn't pay to live with people," Mrs. Martin said. "You've wintered and summered your old friends and you know just what to expect of them. But what when it comes to new ones—well, you most always lose the friendship if you get under the same roof with them. I must say, though, that Phoebe's standing being tied to the house with more patience than I've ever given her credit for. The only thing that seems to worry her is that she can't wear any of those high-heeled shoes she's collected. She hates those flat things."

And in point of fact, although all the young people except Tug had stopped coming to the house, Mrs. Martin remained blindly unconscious of the way things were going. Of all people, Ernest, home from Princeton on a flying visit, let drop the remark that first unleashed the dogs of suspicion.

"Say, mother," he said, "what's Phoebe spending all her time with that old dope for? I think he's an awful piece of work. I should think she had a crush on him. Molly Tate told me that none of the girls had been to the house for three weeks. I asked her about it and she said the girls said it was no fun coming here any more. If they came in the morning or the afternoon, they interrupted a lesson, and if they came at night they interrupted a chess game. Phoebe told me that he'd put off his trip to Europe for a month or two."

"Ernie," Mrs. Martin said severely, "I never listened to such nonsense in my life. It displeases me very much to hear you talk like that. Professor

Hazeltine has done a lot to entertain Phoebe, and your father and I feel under obligations to him."

But notwithstanding this rebuke, Ernest's remark took instant root in his mother's mind. By the next morning it had sprouted, had grown a flourishing plant of distrust. In regard to Professor Hazeltine, she had one of those periods of complete mental clearing up which we often delay as long as possible in the case of a prepossessing new friend, especially when he is our own protégé. She admitted frankly that there were some things about him that she now actually detested. He was not at all the simple, genial person that he appeared on the surface. She had seen for a long time that he hated children, although he did his best to conceal it. Mrs. Martin now let the suspicion grow to a certainty that it irritated him when little Gracie Seaver came over every Saturday afternoon to hear the fairy-tales which Phoebe so delighted to read to her. Making another intuitional leap into the dark, Mrs. Martin realized suddenly that he disliked particularly the people who liked Phoebe—Molly Tate, Fannie Marsh, and Tug Warburton. That is to say, he was at his social worst with them. Indeed, as, in the light of Ernest's remark, she ran mentally back over the last six weeks, Mrs. Martin was conscious of seeing many things for the first time. Little under-currents that she had not noticed, now perceptibly roughened the smooth stream of family life. It occurred to her, for instance, that neither she nor Mr. Martin ever entered the Playroom while a

lesson was in progress. And it came to her with a sudden sick sense of panic that it was not because they feared to interrupt but because, subconsciously, they knew themselves to be *de trop*.

From above, even as Mrs. Martin meditated, came the continuous ripple of Phoebe's infectious laughter. With a determined movement of her arm, Mrs. Martin swept up her sewing and marched up to the Playroom.

"I thought I'd come to see how the Italian was going," she said, quietly seating herself at the table.

Mrs. Martin stayed through the entire hour. Her experiment proved much to her. For although Professor Hazeltine unloosed his most exquisite courtesies on her, the lesson proceeded with much less laughter than usual and much more attention to translation.

"Edward," she said that night to Mr. Martin, "I'm worried about something."

"Worried," Mr. Martin repeated, "about what?"

"Phoebe and Professor Hazeltine."

"Phoebe and Professor Hazeltine," Mr. Martin repeated. "What about them? Isn't Phoebe treating him right? She seems——" An expression on his wife's face caught him and he studied it. "Why, mother, you don't mean—— Oh, pshaw, Bertha—— Hazeltine's nearly as old as I am."

"He's older. But that doesn't make any difference to a girl as young as Phoebe," Mrs. Martin said. "If they fall in love with an older man, they

think there's something romantic and self-sacrificing about marrying him."

"But even suppose Phoebe did get a little infatuated," Mr. Martin answered, "she'll get over it. You remember Raikes, mother. Phoebe was crazy about him for a while."

"This is different," Mrs. Martin dissented. "That was only one of those infatuations for actors that all girls have. Besides she got no encouragement. Phoebe bored Mr. Raikes. He never spoke to her unless he had to. She talked about Mr. Raikes all the time. She doesn't say a living thing about Professor Hazeltine. After he's gone, she studies like anything for an hour or so. Then she just dreams away the rest of the day. I watched her to-day—the last hour before he came back she spent looking for him out of the window."

"Well, allowing for the sake of argument that Phoebe has got a little infatuated with him, Hazeltine never would see it. And if he did, it would only amuse him."

"I think he's in love with Phoebe," Mrs. Martin announced quietly.

"Tchk!" Mr. Martin exclaimed, and "Tchk!" he repeated in the maximum of incredulity. But if experience had taught Mr. Martin anything, it was that his wife's intuitions could not be lightly whiffed away. "What makes you think so, Bertha?" he asked patiently.

"I don't know exactly," Mrs. Martin confessed. "I just *feel* it. It's one of those ideas that the mo-

ment you suspect it, a whole lot of things flash across you that you've noticed without thinking about them—and then all of a sudden it comes over you what a fool you've been. He looks at Phoebe all the time, for one thing. Not that I blame him for that!" Mrs. Martin permitted herself the luxury of one of her rare outbursts of praise. "For she's the most beautiful thing I ever put my two eyes on." Then as if something in her husband's silence alarmed her, "Would you want her to *marry* him, father?" she demanded.

"I'd almost rather see her in her grave!" Mr. Martin said simply. "Well, what's to be done?" he asked after an interval of visible mental perturbation.

"Well, I've thought that all out, too," Mrs. Martin said. "The first thing is to get Professor Hazeltine out of the house. I hate to think of doing anything like that. But we don't have to be rude. We can use having company as an excuse. I'll write to-morrow and invite Cousin Maria Reade to come and stay with us—she's always glad of a chance to visit anywhere—her income's so small."

But excellent as was this plan of Mrs. Martin's, it had one flaw—it came too late. For even as they sat gazing at each other in that satisfactory, silent communication which is the special privilege of twenty-odd years of matrimony, Phoebe's voice called from above. "Father, mother," it cooed, "will you both come up here for a moment, please?"

"Dear people," Professor Hazeltine began the

moment they entered the room, "I took the liberty of asking your daughter to call you up here, as I wished to say what I had to say in your presence. She has just done me the honor to accept my hand in marriage and I am now performing the charming formality of asking your consent."

In the scene that followed, Mrs. Martin had no share. White, limp, shaking, she sank, at the outset, a nerveless heap, into the Morris chair. Phoebe bore a part almost as inconspicuous. Pale and silent, too, she was moveless except as her brilliant eyes went in entreaty to her father's face and back in pride to her lover's. Professor Hazeltine kept himself in the main under perfect control. Not until the end did that high pitch of geniality which he set for the interview begin to drop. Mr. Martin was far from urbane. He might be blind to a growing situation; he could show plenty of firmness when the situation broke. His first and last answer to Professor Hazeltine's request was a peremptory, "No."

"But, my dear Mr. Martin," their guest said at last—and, in spite of an obvious effort to blanket it, triumph and insolence blared in his tone—"what have you to say about it, anyway? Nobody can make this decision for Phoebe. And she's of age?"

"You're right there," Mr. Martin said. "She is of age. But if I know my daughter at all, I think I can say that she won't do anything that I absolutely forbid. And I will never give my consent to this marriage. It's preposterous."

But at this, Phoebe rallied and presented to her father a spirit that was the counterpart of his own. "I don't agree to all that, father," she remonstrated. "I'm no longer a child. I'm a woman—you said so, yourself, the other day. I won't agree—I can't agree not to do anything without your consent. But I will say that I won't do anything without telling you all about it first. Oh, dearest father," she broke down suddenly, "don't think that I'm doing this blindfold. I have lain awake nights and thought—and prayed—to find out what was right to do. And I know my mind perfectly now. I love Professor Hazeltine. He is the only man in the world for me. When he first proposed to me ten days ago, he warned me that you would be opposed to it and he begged me to think very carefully before I gave him an answer."

"Well, can't you see what a cur he was," Mr. Martin said, boiling over, "not to come to us first in that case? I will ask you," he addressed himself to Professor Hazeltine, "to leave my house to-morrow.

"And he'll never enter it again," he added later to his wife—his rage still at fever heat.

But Mrs. Martin had regained her natural temperate grip on things. "You do that, Edward," she prophesied, "and she'll be married to him in a month. No, let him come and go as he pleases—you don't have to meet him. But if Phoebe's going to see him, let her see him under her father's roof."

The next day Professor Hazeltine took himself

and his belongings to a Boston hotel. He no longer broke bread with the Martin family, but he spent every evening alone with Phoebe in the front room. From that direction came no longer the steady ripple of Phoebe's mirth but, in its place, the continual low murmur of voices. Within a week, Phoebe's finger drooped under the weight of a huge heart-shaped sapphire, blazing between twin diamonds.

Mr. Martin supplemented this first scene by a long interview with his daughter. When it was over, things stood exactly as if it had never been. After three sleepless nights and much against her own will but prodded on to it by her husband, Mrs. Martin had a long talk with Phoebe during which she told Phoebe exactly what she thought of her fiancé. As she had herself anticipated, its effect was to make Phoebe more strongly his defender, to deflect entirely the stream of her daughter's confidence. But Mrs. Martin could bear Phoebe's thinly-disguised resentment with herself much more easily than her breach with her father. For though there could be no diminution of the love these two bore each other—Phoebe being Phoebe and Mr. Martin being Mr. Martin—their friendship seemed to have died. They met only at meals. Phoebe made a point of carrying on a conversation with her father. Her father made a point of responding at length to any opening. But their talk wandered among subjects carefully general and impersonal. There were whole evenings when Mr. Martin sat silent and abstracted. There were whole days when Phoebe lay



silent. Mrs. Martin herself worked frantically for uncounted hours or wandered listlessly about the house, a bowed, silent figure.

"Oh, I can't tell you, Edward," she said more than once, "how I blame myself for all this! It seems to me now that I ought to have known what kind of a man he was the first time I saw him. And yet, when you come down to it, there's nothing you can put your hand on, so's a girl will understand. If he'd only drank or forged or was a bigamist! But his habits are good as far as I can see. He's honorable in money-matters, generous to a fault. He's as dainty about his clothes as any woman. In fact, sometimes I think he's good, not because he's naturally fine, but because he's only got the coldness of—of—well, fastidiousness, I guess you'd call it. Oh, if I'd only seen it coming, I'd have sent her away."

"Why not try that now?" Mr. Martin suggested, coming out of an interval of morose meditation.

"No, no, no!" Mrs. Martin almost screamed, "that would be the worst thing we could possibly do. He'd follow her."

"He doesn't love Phoebe," she broke out fiercely one night. "He can't love. He's as cold as a stone. You know how he carries those unset gems about in his pocket and how he likes to take them out and look at them. He wants to own Phoebe for the same reason. He wants to look at her and think how beautiful she is and that he owns her. And he

thinks because she's so young, he can mold her. I'm not so sure of that," she ended with a touch of triumph, "Phoebe's got a will and a mind of her own."

But in open contradiction of this last statement, she added a week later: "I never saw a girl with so little spunk as Phoebe. Why, it's just as if she was under a spell, or he'd hypnotized her. She hasn't an idea at present that isn't his. She treasures everything he says and she just lives to please him. The other day he said he admired a woman's hair to be done in a net—like some pictures he spoke of in the library in Siena. Phoebe sent to Boston the moment he left the house for those hair-nets she's wearing now. She isn't half so pretty with a net on. It holds her curls down flat and takes all the light out of her hair. And now she's having Miss Symonds make her a dress like one in a picture of an Italian saint that he gave her just because he likes it. She can just manage to stand up long enough to have it tried on—it's a horrid dusty color and a dreadful pattern, a flat-looking, shapeless sort of thing. It makes her look ten years older. She doesn't wear middies any longer because he doesn't like them. And what she doesn't know is that he hates them because they make her look so young. Oh, when he marries her, he'll make her dress just the way he wants. He's proud that he's won a girl so young. At the same time, it's gall and wormwood to him that she looks so much younger than he. Why, sometimes he looks so *old* now."

“And, oh, Edward,” she wailed at a later period, “it’s worse even than I thought. I’ve known for a long time that he couldn’t stand Molly and Fonnies and Tug, but the reason is he’s jealous—terribly jealous. Why, to-day after lunch, Tug came over and spent the afternoon with Phoebe. He was telling her about some things they did over to Harvard to some boys they were initiating into the D.K.E. and Phoebe was nearly dying with laughter—oh, and Edward, it seemed good to hear the poor child laughing once more! Well, right in the midst of it, Professor Hazeltine came. While he was taking his things off, he heard Phoebe carrying on upstairs. I wish you could have seen the way his face changed. His mouth set like a trap and that queer light came into his eyes—you know—when things aren’t going the way he wants them—Edward, he’s got real cat’s eyes at those times. Well, I didn’t say much to him—I can’t talk to him nowadays. And in a minute he went upstairs. Tug came down at once—he never stays when Hazeltine is here. A little later, I heard Hazeltine giving Phoebe the greatest dressing-down—I couldn’t hear what he said, but I could tell by the tone. And Phoebe cried! I wish you could have seen the way her eyes looked after he left. He’s the kind of a man who, if he’s jealous, would make a woman’s life a hell on earth. He’ll always be pulled two ways. He’ll want his wife to be a social leader, but he’ll take it out of her for every bit of admiration she gets.”

“Well, do you mean to tell me that a girl like

Phoebe will stand for anything like that?" Mr. Martin demanded.

Mrs. Martin nodded drearily. "She's young enough to be flattered by it, even when it hurts her. Young people think love isn't love unless there's some jealousy connected with it. Isn't there something we can do, Edward?" she begged desperately.

But only the cold comfort of her own words came back to her. "We're doing all we can. I could forbid him the house, but that would only mean that they'd meet outside."

It was now late in February. Phoebe's ankle had begun to strengthen. In the heelless soft-leather shoes that Dr. Bush had ordered, she was now making tentative journeys about the house, carefully supported by her fiancé. It would be only a question of a few days before she would be able to go out.

"She says she can't stand this much longer, Edward," Mrs. Martin announced stonily one night. "She says at first she thought she'd wait a year or two, but now she thinks she'll be married in June. Oh, Edward, I can't let her do it. I *can't*. Isn't there something you can do?"

"Not a thing. The jig's up. Tell her if she wants a quiet wedding with only the family present, she can be married at home."

"She says," Mrs. Martin brought back on lips that worked, "that it wouldn't be any comfort to her, under the circumstances, to have a wedding. Just as soon as she's able, they'll go in to Boston and be married by a minister there who's a friend of his."

"Very well," Mr. Martin said.

But the next night when Mr. Martin came home to dinner, there was a different spring to his walk, a look faintly suggestive of triumph in his face. Mrs. Martin wondered if he had found a way out of the maze of their unhappiness. But although she met his eyes with a mute, wistful questioning, he volunteered nothing, and she asked no questions. Another day that she lived through by a system of studying the clock at ten-minute intervals, and he came home, a white, wearied, languid creature, utterly spent and discouraged.

"Bertha," he said after dinner. "I was the happiest man in the world yesterday. I thought I'd got hold of something that would stew Hazeltine's goose. A woman came into my office. Her name was Severin—Eugenia Severin. After some batting around and a good deal of sparring for an opening, she came down to cases. She said that she'd heard—she didn't say how—that Professor Hazeltine was paying attention to my daughter. She said that she couldn't let that go on because it was up to Hazeltine to marry her. She said she had the goods on him and threatened breach of promise. Well, at first I thought it was a simple case of blackmail until she showed me a page of Hazeltine's handwriting and—and—the long and short of it was, this morning she left a wad of letters with me and asked me to read them. Well, I did read them, you bet, every last one. And I guess no man ever hoped harder to get it on another man. But there was nothing

to it. As far as I can see, he's been perfectly square—and it's evident from the letters that she went in to it with her eyes open. Anyway, he never said in writing that he'd marry her. The case would last about three minutes in court. I told her that. It staggered her, but she seemed to trust my judgment. She told me I could keep the letters for a week, though, and do anything I wished with them. I know what she wants me to do, all right. Now, mother, I'll admit I haven't any principles in the matter. I'd do anything to beat that cur. But I'll be guided by what you say. What do you want? It's all up to you."

There was a long pause, and in the silence Mrs. Martin sat like a petrified thing. She came out of it with a sigh that stirred through the room a heavy gust of grief. "Well, as long as he's been fair to this Severin woman, I guess we haven't any right to show his letters to Phoebe. I wouldn't feel justified in my conscience to do such a thing."

"Well," Mr. Martin exclaimed in a voice of despair, "I give you women up. You may know why you act the way you do, but I never expect to fathom it."

"All right, I'll tell you why I do this if you want to know," Mrs. Martin said with a sudden flash of an emotion unusual in her. "When you first came back to East Wilton, Edward Martin, after you'd graduated from Harvard, you got the reputation of being pretty wild, though I didn't know it. And after I got engaged to you, that old Mrs. Burn-

ham, who lived in the yellow house next to Uncle Henry's, came to me and told me the greatest mess of stuff about you. Of course it didn't make any difference and I never said a word about it to you, but at the same time," Mrs. Martin's voice thickened with sudden passion, "I've never thanked her for telling me."

"What did she tell you?" Mr. Martin asked curiously.

"Never you mind," Mrs. Martin answered. "I guess I haven't reached my time of life without knowing better than to put you in a position where you've got to lie to me."

"Well—but—but it hasn't seemed to occur to you that I might not have to lie," Mr. Martin remarked after what was visibly a silent foray into his own past.

"No, it *hasn't!*" Mrs. Martin said with emphasis. "And besides I know this—although it would hurt Phoebe and set her against us, it wouldn't make any difference in the long run. She'd marry him the sooner. What did that Severin woman look like?"

"Very good-looking, I call her. Big and tall—flashing black eyes—fine figure."

"How old was she?"

"Oh, thirty-five or forty—somewhere along there. Well, mother, I guess, as far as Phoebe's concerned, we've thrown away our last shot."

"I guess we have, father."

And as it happened, they had. A week later

Phoebe did not come down to the library until dinner was over; and then she was dressed to go out. She wore the long mediæval-looking gown that added so much to her years and stature; and, over it, her long dark evening-coat. New gloves, a fresh veil—she was cap-a-pie, even to the high-heeled shoes at which Dr. Bush had stormed in vain. Her face was swollen and her eyes dull over reddened pouches.

“I’ve come to say good-by,” she said. “I’m going in town to meet Professor Hazeltine and we shall be married to-night. We’ll board in Cambridge for the rest of his stay here. I’ll come out as soon as you want to see me.”

Mrs. Martin did not remonstrate. Neither did she weep. It is highly probable that Damocles knew his only flash of happiness after his fate found him, in the instant that the sword fell. And so that calmness, which comes when the expected calamity occurs, wrapped Mrs. Martin in its serenity. She kissed her daughter and, except for a slight twitching of his face, Mr. Martin was able to mimic her composure.

Then the door closed and Phoebe was gone.

“Well, father,” Mrs. Martin said—and by some miracle of woman fortitude she smiled at the broken man opposite her—“it’s all out of our hands now. We’ve done our best and——”

“——we’ve failed,” Mr. Martin carried it on. “But, as you say, we’ve done our best.” He tried to smile, but he gave it up. “I don’t know what we bring them into the world for,” he added a little later.



"Father, you're not sorry that we've had Phoebe?" A note of anxiety seared through Mrs. Martin's unnatural calm. It was as though she felt that she had failed as a wife.

Mr. Martin considered this. "No," he said, "I'm glad we had her if only for this little while. It seems a very little while, though."

That was the only verbal interruption to the evening. Aunt Mary's big clock called a sonorous eight and nine and ten and eleven. Flora went out the back door at eight and returned at ten. The cat, coming in with her, propelled its big black bulk across the room by a series of furry arches that followed the furniture. Mikey, the fox-terrier, man-handled her for a while, according to his affectionate custom, and then fell into a snoring snooze on the rug, one paw about her. The fire kept up a persistent, cheerful crackle. And once Julia, the second maid, came silently in and fed it. Mrs. Martin sat at one side of the table counting innumerable stitches and thought her thoughts. Mr. Martin sat at the other side of the table, lighting his pipe at minute-long intervals, and thought his thoughts. And yet, in spite of this quiet, the air seemed thick to saturation with emotion.

At half-past eleven there came the sound of heel-taps clicking from the gate up the concrete walk to the house. Mr. Martin did not turn, but he took his pipe from his mouth. The heel-taps dotted their way up the steps. Mrs. Martin did not turn, but she sat suspended in the midst of a stitch. A key turned

in the lock. The door opened and shut. Still they did not move.

"I've come back," Phoebe said.

"I'm not married," she went on in her clear voice, "I'm not engaged any more. It's all over. I've given him back his ring."

Still neither of her auditors spoke. They only stared. Phoebe went and stood at her father's chair. She began to tell her story to him just as if she were a child again.

"He was at the station to meet me. And right there, when I was on my way to marry him, we had our first quarrel. Our first *real* quarrel," she corrected herself. "We'd had others. But I didn't call them quarrels because I never was angry. I see now they were always caused by his jealousy. But as we stood in the station, he happened to catch a glimpse of us both in the mirror there. I was about an inch taller than he. You see, I had my high-heeled shoes on for the first time. I saw his face change at once, but I couldn't, for the life of me, imagine what was the matter. I had sort of got into the way of trying to think not to do or say things that would annoy him. But—but—now that I was away from you two, I realized that I was a little afraid of him. I'd had dreadful scenes with him again and again, but always when one of you was downstairs. You didn't know about it because he was always careful to keep his voice low."

There was a sound in the room. Mrs. Martin

knew it was the grinding of Mr. Martin's teeth. But Phoebe did not hear it. She went on.

"He said that I must stop in Boston and get a pair of shoes without heels and that I must never wear anything else as long as I lived. I was only too glad to do that. I still thought it was because I would have done anything to make him care for me and be kind again." She stopped and strangled a little. "But I see now it was mainly because I was frightened. We found a Jew place that was open and I tried some shoes on. There was only one pair that would fit me—horrid cheap-looking boats of things. And I put them on. The man had left us for a moment, and he was being very sweet to me the way he always was after—— But just as I was buttoning up the last button, I felt that I simply could not keep them on—I asked him if I could wear my own shoes to be married in. And I said that he could have his way in every single living thing, if he'd only let me wear high heels, for I did love pretty slippers and shoes. His face got perfectly dreadful, and he said, 'Certainly not. Do you think I'm going to walk through life with a woman taller than myself?' And then it came over me that I'd given up everything for him—my father, my mother, my friends, the wedding I'd always wanted—and yet he could not give up this one little thing for me. I saw all of a sudden what life with him would be like—I would always be giving up high heels as long as I lived. I didn't say a word, but I took those shoes right off and put my own on. 'Did you

hear me say that I wouldn't walk through life with a woman taller than myself?' he said again. 'Yes, I heard,' I answered. 'The only trouble is that you said it too soon, because now you're going to walk through life without me altogether.' And I walked out of the shop and left him there."

Phoebe paused, and then, unbelievably, she laughed—a little dry, sarcastic jet of laughter. "I think some day that I'll be able to see that this is funny. But now I don't want to talk about it ever again." She paused. Then disjointedly: "Tug was at the station. He brought me home in the auto. I think he saw that something was wrong, but he didn't ask any questions. Oh, what a friend Tug has been to me!" Another pause. Then even more disjointedly, "Father, I guess I've been crazy, but I guess I know as well as anybody what a wicked girl I've been. I guess I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make it up to you two."

Phoebe did not address her mother. Perhaps she knew she had no need. Mrs. Martin's eyes were shining on the sight of her daughter with her father's arms about her once more. And then later came her chance when, prolonging the happy privilege of helping Phoebe to bed, she tucked her in.

"Mother," was Phoebe's last faint word before the good-night kiss, "somehow I feel old."

Mrs. Martin, luxuriating in the relief that comes from the instantaneous disappearance of a great anguish, smiled a little. Phoebe's aspect of grief—her white face, her vacant eyes, her working mouth

had made her seem so young in contrast with the old-looking gown and the chastening hair-net. "Old," she said to herself as she lay down for the first time in many weeks to a night of perfect rest, "*old.*"

But the next morning when Phoebe came down to breakfast—the Phoebe superficially of three months before—a Phoebe in a fresh middy blouse and her curls flying free—Mrs. Martin saw that, in a sense, her daughter was right. There had been a change. Somewhere in the night Phoebe and her womanhood had met and joined hands.

## CHAPTER III

### PHOEBE AMONG THE BOHEMIANS

MR. MARTIN would have said that the direct cause of Phoebe's visit to New York was a letter. Phoebe would have said that it was a book. As for the indirect causes—if she had conducted him through the labyrinth of choked and broken pillars which was the ruin of her simple girl-psychology, Mr. Martin would not have been more puzzled than Phoebe herself. She wrote Sylvia Gordon that Mrs. Raeburn's invitation and Henri Murger's "*La Vie de Bohème*" came "as if sent by fate at *the psychological moment*." A conversation with her father cleared up much to him.

"Father," she said, "I think I will go on to New York. I've made up my mind to stay a month or maybe longer. I know other people there beside the Raeburns—Tom and Eleanor Hight and Augusta Pugh."

"I think it would be a very good idea to go away from home for a while, Phoebe," Mr. Martin answered immediately. It seemed to him that he made that remark in a perfectly natural tone of voice. But Phoebe came over and seated herself on the side of his chair. She continued the conversation with one arm about her father's neck. "Now,

father, don't think I'm going because I'm sad. I'm only restless. Father, I'll tell you a secret. I'm just dying for a sort of Bohemian existence for a while. And New York is Bohemia, from all I've read about it. Did you ever know any really-truly Bohemians, father?"

"No," Mr. Martin said with decision. "All my friends work for a living. Bohemia, as a resort, has come into fashion since my salad days. It really isn't a country, Phoebe, or even a state of mind. It's a disease. Young people nowadays seem to have to go through it just as they have to get their second teeth. I think the time will come when we'll be compelled by law to expose our children to Bohemianism at an early age, so they can catch a mild attack and get over it. No, I've never lived there. I don't think I've ever known a real Bohemian. You see, I married very young and, as far as I can gather, there's nothing so withering to the free air of Bohemia as a breath of matrimony."

"Well, father, you'll have to admit," Phoebe retorted with a flash of the old Phoebe, "that marriage does make people *awfully stupid*. I don't see why it should, either. But, honestly and truly, father, when I study the married people in Maywood, it's enough to make me vow to be an old maid all my life. They're so *contented*! Don't you *hate* contented people, father? Why, nobody here seems to have an idea above making a good home, giving the children an education, and sort of keeping an eye on Maywood and the country at large."

"After all," Mr. Martin said meekly, "that's some job, Phoebe."

"Anybody ought to be able to do it with one hand tied," Phoebe announced with scorn.

"Bertha," Mr. Martin said later, "what do you think Phoebe wants to do now? She wants to lead a Bohemian existence for a while."

It was so long before Mrs. Martin spoke that Mr. Martin finally looked at her in apprehension. But, as often happened, when her comment came, it was a surprise to him. "Well, Edward, I know you'll be astonished, but I don't blame that child at all. I've had that same feeling again and again myself. Do you know what my favorite stories in the magazines are? About groups of young people—artists and singers and actors and writers—meeting every night at an Italian restaurant, and the love stories that grow out of them. I often wish I'd had an experience like that. At first I used to think that there must be something wicked about that kind of life. But now, the more I study it, the more it seems right that young folks should have their fling—in an innocent way, of course—before they get married. When I read those stories, I always feel as if I'd missed something. Not that I'd give up one hour of our married life. And yet I'd hate to think of Phoebe and Ernie going through all we went through so young. Do you remember that time when Phoebe was a little girl and Dr. Bush was afraid she had diphtheria? You were on the road and I couldn't get you anywhere. Oh, what a week



that was! And Ernie was such a good little thing, I remember—played all day long by himself and never made one speck of trouble.”

“Well, I guess we won’t have to think of Phoebe’s getting married yet a while,” Mr. Martin said. And, inconsistently, he sighed.

He was approaching a subject virtually taboo between them. “Now let’s not think of that, father,” Mrs. Martin interjected. “Phoebe’s all right now. That was a terrible experience for her, but a girl’s first love-affair is more than likely to be unhappy. Think of Fannie Todd and Nellie Downing and Flossie Burnham. And Phoebe’s been so plucky about it! She wouldn’t go away at first. That’s like her—to stay on the spot and fight it out. And now that she’s willing to go shows that the worst is over. Have you ever noticed, Edward, how Phoebe plays tennis? She always starts off with a terrible dash and then, somewhere along the middle of the game, she seems to go right to pieces—she can’t hit a ball or anything. Oh, I’ve heard Ernie and Tug call her down so hard. And then, somehow, somewhere near the end, she seems to brace up in a flash, and plays like a streak. It’s what people call ‘a second wind,’ I guess. Phoebe’s just getting that now—it’s a new kind of strength.”

“Yes, she’s game—I give her credit for that. She’s always had plenty of grit and ginger and get-up-and-go. But now she seems so listless and idle,” Mr. Martin answered. “It seems as if she’d never get over it.”

"She *is* over it," Mrs. Martin said with the quiet certainty of conviction. "But in the meantime something else has happened. It isn't alone that terrible experience that's made the change—Phoebe became a woman in a night, as you might say. It's as if she'd been promoted suddenly to an upper class in the middle of the term—she can't seem to get the hang of anything. Most girls go gradually from childhood to girlhood and from girlhood to womanhood. But Phoebe was thrown into womanhood—poor little thing. She's all bruised and sore. Oh, Edward, I'm sure the worst of that experience with Professor Hazeltine is over; she doesn't regret. It's trying to adjust herself that makes her so strange."

"Hasn't she ever said anything about it to you since that night?" Mr. Martin asked.

"She's never breathed a word," Mrs. Martin answered. "That's Phoebe. She's the kind that talks all the time about *little* things. But let some *big* thing come along and she shuts right up. I *want* her to go to New York—I think it will do her any amount of good. I like Mrs. Raeburn very much, and of course it will be a great experience for Phoebe just to live in that beautiful house. New York people are so different, too. They go so much. They'll do anything to make it gay for Phoebe. Oh, it's almost an act of Providence!"

Perhaps the interstices in this talk and in Phoebe's conversation with her father can be best filled by the following notes:

## 60      Phoebe Among the Bohemians

DEAR SYLVIA:

It is all settled and I'm off Thursday for New York to investigate *la vie de Boheme*. I told father and mother that I'd be gone a month. But if I like it, I shall stay all winter. Oh, Sylvia, I am so desperately unhappy. I feel reckless. One thing I'd like to say, although I know I needn't say this to you. Of course it was an accident your coming upon me just after Tug proposed to me that time. I know you wouldn't mention it, but please don't even remember it. I feel as if a girl ought to be as secret about such things as a man. Above all things, don't let Tug suspect that you know. And be awfully good to him.      P. M.

DEAR ELEANOR AND TOM:

I am coming on to New York for a long visit. Please let me see you while I'm there. I am inclosing a card with my address. Everybody in Maywood is envying you two frantically—they say you have such gay times.

Yours very cordially,

PHOEBE MARTIN.

MY DEAR AUGUSTA:

Have you forgotten Phoebe Martin and how we used to write foolish diaries together? A great many things have happened since then and I don't know how you regard the Augusta Pugh that I used to know. I assure you that I look upon the Phoebe Martin that you used to know as a *conceited little idiot*.

Tug Warburton told me that he met you in New York when he was there last. That is how I know enough to send this care of "The Moment." I am coming to New

York for a visit and I do wish I might see you. Enclosed is a card with my address.

Yours very sincerely,

PHOEBE MARTIN.

DEAREST MOTHER:

This is really my first chance to write a long letter. For, oh, the last three days have been so gay. Tell father, that with my usual luck I landed right in the heart of Bohemia. But I'll return to that later. And in the meantime, I'll tell you about——

Mother, I thought I knew what luxury was before I came to New York. For of course the Warburton house and the Marsh place are perfectly beautiful. Also Marblehead was simply filled with lovely homes. Then again, when we were abroad, Mrs. Warburton often stayed at very expensive hotels. But Mrs. Raeburn lives on a scale of magnificence that I have read about only in novels. That hurried lunch that we had in passing through when I came home from Europe could give you no idea of the resources of her household—well, it's what in novels they call an "establishment." I have not yet got the run of the servants—there must be sixteen. I have always wondered how many maids you had to have before you could get a butler, how many butlers it took to make a coachman, how many coachmen to make a footman. Well, if I keep on counting, maybe I'll find out. Not that Mrs. Raeburn has coachmen or footmen. She hasn't. But she has a French chauffeur and three motors. Mother, I wish you could see their touring-car. Ern Martin would simply have to be tied. I don't know whether you could be operated on

for appendicitis in it but you could do anything else. Cosmetics, writing-materials, sewing-things, books, papers, magazines, a medicine case, a tea-table—and always a bunch of fresh flowers in a hanging vase.

I guess the easiest way to tell you what I've done is to describe the program of my day. In the first place, I have a suite of rooms all to myself—that is, a living-room, chamber, dressing-room, and bath—all in white and pink, with closets enough to stock a hotel (electric lights in every one of them), and *furnished*—mother, it looks like a stage-setting. Every morning about nine, in comes a maid with my breakfast (which I'm supposed to eat in bed) on a tray. But I cannot for the life of me eat that way, so the moment she's gone, I hop out, spread everything on a table, and devour every blessed morsel she's brought me. I wish I could pause to tell you about the wonderful china and the Sheffield plate, but if I stop for details, I'll never get anywhere. In the morning, I go to art exhibitions or shopping or walk with the children in Central Park and feed the animals in the menagerie. Lunch comes about two. In Maywood, we would call it a dinner-party. Tea comes at five. If we have it at home, somebody always seems to come in. Sometimes they ask to see the children. And in that case down come Althea, Marjorie, and Phyllis, in white cobwebby frocks and petti-skirts, white stockings and white shoes, all floating golden curls, tied with rose ribbons, carrying their toys and followed by their pets—their toys great woolly lambs and great golden-haired dollies dressed just as extravagantly as they—their pets two white Spitz dogs and a mammoth white Angora cat. When that blonde procession comes streaming into the great dark, shadowy

wainscoted library, I always feel as if I were living in a fairy-tale. And for the tea itself, I never *heard* of such sandwiches or *dreamed* of such cakes—it's fairy food, all right.

Generally, however, we go out to tea—to Sherry's or Del's or the Plaza or the Gotham. Mrs. Raeburn always tells Henri to drive slowly up and down the Avenue for about a half an hour so that I can see the spectacle, and she sits beside me and points out celebrities—opera people, actors, society folks, writers, painters—it's just as if "Who's Who in America" was parading past. And such a picture as it is. At the upper end of the Avenue, the houses make a cliff against the sky on one side, the Park trees a great bank of shadow on the other. You feel just as if way up there, a huge giant were shaking out of an enormous cornucopia carriages and hansom and taxis and motors of every description, all filled with gorgeously dressed women, exquisite children, smart nurses, lovely brown, fluffy, pointy-nosed Chow dogs, or little, smoky, saucy bright-eyed Pomeranians. There's something wonderful about the New York air. In the distance you see patches of light and shade on the houses just as you've seen sun and shadow break on a cliff or hillside. And later, as it gets towards dark and the double rows of the Avenue lights blaze up into that dusky-blue vapor which is the New York twilight—mother, they look like parallel necklaces of huge purple pearls or great blue opals strung from Washington Square, where they begin, to Murray Hill, where they burst right through the sky and disappear. Oh, it's so beautiful! Something in me seems to sing and dance when I'm on the Avenue. I guess lots of women feel that way, for it's

always full of women. And such beauties, too! Only, mother, they're so different from Boston women! I don't exactly know how to describe my sensations. But when you're walking in Boston and you see a woman dressed extremely, and conspicuous in every sense of the word, you know that she's not a nice person and that's all there is *to it*. But in New York, they all look that way. Why, you feel as if everybody's nice or nobody's nice. I give it up. But, anyway, I don't care as long as they make such pictures. And they do literally make pictures of themselves—*hand-painted*, so to speak. Everybody seems to paint. Mrs. Raeburn does for dinner. And last night, Félice, who's her maid and who waits on me by inches, coaxed me to let her put a little color on my face. I said "Yes," just for fun, and it looked so pretty I let it stay. (Now tell Father Martin that he needn't go right up in the air, for I shall never do it again. I just wanted to see how it looked. But I didn't feel right all the evening.)

At night we go to the theater generally. Theater nights we have dinner at seven, other nights at eight. Last night we saw, what do you think, Mr. Raikes' opening in the new Glaive play—"A He and She Affair." We had a box and he saw me the moment he came on the stage. I could feel him playing to us all the evening. It was terribly flattering. Mrs. Raeburn says that young girls go perfectly crazy over him. That's *inexplicable* to me, for, mother, he looks quite old. After the theater, you always go somewhere for supper, notwithstanding the fact that you can't be the least bit hungry. But, oh, you'd eat live coals to be in the room with those gowns—so many wonderful women—all looking as if they were heroines of romance. If I

lived in New York I'd put up a tent where Fifth Avenue and Broadway cross. For New York does not exist outside of these streets. For me, the Avenue by day—and Broadway by night! Broadway at night! They call it "the alley of stars!" All the shops are lighted up, and above them to the roofs, wonderful electric signs are flashing gold and darkening black before your eyes. It's just as if you were driving between parallel rows of noiseless fireworks or a pair of perfectly well-trained conflagrations. Do you remember those kaleidoscopes that Ern and I were so crazy about when we were children? Well, you feel as if you were suspended in the middle of one of those. And then when the theaters let out and the crowds begin to pack the streets, you see nothing as far as the eye can reach but fluttering plumes, the flash of jewels, the sheen of velvet and satin and fur, you hear nothing but the sound of the theater men megaphoning for taxis and all kinds of motors starting up. I saw nothing like it in Paris—nothing so gay or so different. Mother, why is it that a woman just loves to go where there's a lot of money being spent? It just *exhilarates* me. All I can say is that when I get home, I lie for an hour trying to simmer down to a sleep-level. This must be all for now.

Your loving,

PHOEBE.

DEAREST MOTHER:

Now about Bohemia! All that's necessary to prove to you that I'm living in that wonderful country is to tell you the names of the great people I'm meeting. Mrs. Raeburn has given two dinner parties for me. She had a long talk with me when I first came and she said she



would like to give a dance. But I told her I much preferred the dinner-parties, for I had never been to one. Besides, I got enough dancing in Maywood. She told me that she was much relieved at my decision. She said that she would be up against it getting men, because she had no daughters of the *débutante* age. She says New York men are an awfully independent lot. She says they can go anywhere, opera, theater, dinner without its costing them anything, even common courtesy, so why should they come to a dance where they would have to exert themselves? Now about the dinners.

At the first one, the guests of honor were Blanche Hokeby, the novelist, and Perugia, the wonderful Italian tenor. You must have read some of her stories, mother. She writes awfully clever ones—you're never quite sure what she's driving at and they almost always end before they're begun. He was a big, black bounding giant of a man, so full of life that he looks as if a sick person could be made well just by touching him. She's the kind of a woman that you know you'll think is beautiful the *third* time you've seen her. She looks like one of those high art photographs—as if the print hadn't been developed quite enough. They talked wonderfully—only they're so different. When Perugia talks you feel as if an electric fan were playing magnetism over you—he's *spraying you* with his personality. And when she talks, you feel the way you do when you're standing on a railroad platform and an express rushes by—sort of *pulled into* her personality. Somehow they got to trading hard-luck stories in regard to how they got started. Perugia was awfully funny. He told us all with the utmost simplicity how he began as a sort of singing waiter in an Italian café, and he

illustrated with the dishes what fierce breaks he made in serving. And he seemed to be proud as a lion over the number of plates he could balance on his arm. "Those were the happiest days of my life, though," he said, "the days of the first applause."

Mrs. Hokeby told all about the little Western mining camp in which she was brought up, and how she used to write rocking the baby's cradle with her foot. She was dreadfully poor then, only getting about one story in sixteen accepted. "But those were wonderful times," she said, "those days of the first acceptances and the first checks." After dinner, we went into the music-room and she sang some cowboy songs for Perugia—"The Dying Cowboy" and "Sam Bass" are all that I can remember. He was perfectly delighted with them, and in return he sang some peasant songs for her—just the ones he used to sing when he was a waiter. Afterward he happened to come and sit beside me. As he approached me, it all came over me with a feeling that, somehow, there was magic in it, that here was Perugia—the *only* Perugia, that Boston is just dying to hear,—and how I could go back to Maywood and tell them all about him. I don't know how I looked, but he said, "Have a care, mademoiselle, or your eyes will leap out." And I said, "Well, how would you feel if you'd never been any nearer to yourself than a Victor-Victrola?" And he laughed and laughed and he said that reminded him he was going to sing into a phonograph to-morrow morning, and if Mrs. Raeburn would care to come he'd stop in his car and take us both to hear it. Well, you can imagine how I felt when he said that—I was just about dippy with delight for the whole rest of the evening. And when he left, I was

so afraid he'd forget and yet I didn't want to remind him. But I looked at him as beseechingly as I could and he just laughed and said, "No, I won't forget."

Two nights later, there was another dinner-party—this time the guests of honor were Mrs. John Marks Sinclair, you know that New York society woman whose picture is always in the paper, the one who's made such a hit at the English court—and Raoul, the great French painter. Mother, if they weren't the most extraordinary pair! I'm going to tell you just how she was dressed down to the last detail, for if I don't tell somebody I'll *burst*. I will say first that she wore on her head a silver fillet. All back of that fillet, her hair was brown. All front of it, it was orange. Yes, sir—*orange*—not red nor gold, nor auburn, nor Titian, but orange, the exact color of a tangerine. She was made up, although I did not know this until Mrs. Raeburn told me. It seems that her face and neck and arms were covered with a white paste. Out of that, her eyes blazed like topazes and her lips flamed like geranium petals. She looked like one of those French posters that I've always believed were so exaggerated before. But the best is yet to come—her gown. It was of velvet, the color of moleskin, and it was shaped like an umbrella-case. How she got into it is still puzzling me. Either her maid folded it round her and then sewed it on, or she laid it flat on the ground like a gas-pipe and Mrs. Sinclair crawled into it. At the back near the ground it was weighted down by two heavy silver—*bosses*, I guess you'd call them—they looked like doorknobs. The corsage was a mass of silver lace, carrying out the color motif of the fillet. She wore so many chains around her neck that I could not count

them—all very fine, gold and pearl and jade, earrings that touched her shoulder like little pagodas, also of gold and pearl and jade—and rings of gold and pearl and jade. Right in the midst of the chains there hung two inch-square emeralds, *wonderful* against her white skin, and on one hand, all alone, was another inch-square emerald. Father will hoot at this, but you will understand, mother, I know, when I tell you she was *bewildering* to look at. I have never seen such beautiful manners. After dinner, everybody in the room sat beside her a little while and chatted with her. She hardly spoke herself, but she looked right straight into their eyes and listened so sweetly. I said to myself, "When it comes my turn, I'm going to make *you* talk, my lady." But I didn't. The first thing I knew I was telling her all about *you*. And she said you must be just like her own mother and how she would like to meet you. And I said if she ever came to Maywood she must stay with us and she said she would. Mrs. Raeburn says that princes have been in love with her, and I don't *wonder*.

As for Raoul—mother, I think I have never seen such a wonderful old face, or such a sad one. Mrs. Raeburn says that, some years ago, he lost a beautiful wife and a splendid son all within a month of each other; that he has never been the same man since. Mother, he looks the soldier, the student, the artist, and the gentleman. There is something magnificently stern about him, if you know what I mean, and yet under the bitterness and sadness in his eyes, his look is so gentle and kind! His hair is silver-white and his face waxen-white. But his eyebrows are jet-black and every line in his face that means grief looks as if it had been gone over with a black pencil.

At dinner, Mrs. Sinclair told us some perfectly marvelous stories about the German court—when she was a girl her uncle was American ambassador there. Why, mother, she's known *slathers* of royalty.

Mr. Raeburn told Perugia's story about being a waiter and, somehow, that seemed to start Raoul. He said that when he began to paint he was one of a group of struggling young artists, all equally poor and equally ambitious. For a studio, they shared one big icy garret. They used to station one of their number at the window, turn and turn about, to watch. And if he saw a newspaper blowing along the street, it was up to him to beat it down the stairs and capture it, so that they could burn it in the fireplace and warm their fingers for a few moments. For pot-boilers, they made little illuminated card-pictures of saints—one would do the face, another the drapery, and a third the wings. Then they'd draw lots as to who should stand on the steps of the Madeleine Sunday and sell them. He said, "Oh, I was so poor and so cold and so hungry in those days." He stopped for an instant and his thoughts seemed to go way off—or *back*, I guess. "And so happy," he added. "Those were the happiest days of my life when my fingers first felt what they could do."

Your loving,

PHOEBE.

P.S.—Mrs. Beale, Eleanor Hight's aunt, was at the dinner. She's just as mad as ever because Eleanor married Tom. She says Eleanor comes to see her regularly, but she herself would not step a foot inside the dreadful place in which Eleanor lives.

DEAR PHOEBE:

Tug has been over here every night since you left. He makes all kinds of excuses, but I know of course that he comes to hear your letters. I read them all to him and he just drinks them down to the last drop. Last night, in sheer desperation, I took him over to Ethel Locke. You know what a stunning thing she is and what a corking girl. She always has a crowd about her and we had an awfully good time. Tug made the rabbit for her and I heard him really laugh for the first time in a week. Lovingly,

SYLVIA.

The night before Phoebe left Mrs. Raeburn's house, that lady came into her room for a farewell chat.

"I've had such a lovely time, Mrs. Raeburn," Phoebe began gratefully. "I guess I just haven't got words enough to tell you all that I feel about it. It's as beautiful an experience as Europe, for although *there* I've seen the most wonderful *places*, here I've seen the most wonderful *people*."

Mrs. Raeburn's bright eyes grew, if possible, a little brighter. She had been, as Raoul's portrait attested and her three little daughters proved, a rose-and-pearl blonde, delicately and yet deeply-hued. At this moment, although she looked like a flower on the first day of fading, a certain child-like quality of enthusiasm seemed to bring forth remnants of these colors. Indeed, she seemed Phoebe's contemporary in years, her equal in spirits.

"Phoebe," she declared earnestly, "you could

not possibly have enjoyed it more than Mr. Raeburn and I. I'm going to tell you a secret. I met Mr. Raeburn first when I was visiting New York. I shall never forget—and he says he never will—my first enthusiasm over it. All our married life we've been saying that sometime we'd find a young girl as unspoiled as I was and give her that same experience. We had not known you an hour on the boat before we saw that you were the one. And tell your mother that you've been a perfect dear. You've repaid us a thousandfold, in appreciation, everything we've done for you."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Raeburn," Phoebe said. "But I guess I haven't told you yet what's almost the nicest thing about it. It's that I found Bohemia right here in your home. Before I came on, I hoped that I'd have some experience with the Bohemian life and here it was just waiting for me. I'll never forget as long as I live the great geniuses you've introduced me to."

Mrs. Raeburn laughed, and to Phoebe there seemed to be an indulgent ring to her mirth. "My dear, you're all wrong there, I'm sorry to say. This isn't Bohemia. From the very nature of things, it couldn't be. *Les arrivés* can never make a Bohemia. In fact, with all my experience in New York life, I have never seen the Bohemia that you read about in books. And, Phoebe, you can't possibly be more interested to see that phase of life than I am. In fact, you're going to see it. According to my idea of it, there's a very real Bohemia at Mrs. Hight's.

Mrs. Beale has told me so often about that extraordinary circle of able young people which her niece has gathered. Not that Mrs. Beale appreciates it—or has seen it even. If she had, I would have asked her to take me there. But she hates it—she mentions it only to scold at Eleanor. Phoebe dear, would you mind inviting me to Mrs. Hight's while you're there? "

"Why, I'd be perfectly delighted!" said Phoebe cordially.

DEAREST MOTHER:

Here I am with Eleanor and Tom. I'm having the time of my life. Tom is just as jolly and witty as ever—and drawls his words out in the same old way. Eleanor is a pippin. She always did have plenty of class. But New York has brought something else out in her—she's smart-looking. People always stare at her in the street—and yet she dresses very simply. If Maywood people think that Eleanor Hight's life is just one long Bohemian *orgy*, they're very much mistaken. In the first place, Tom is trying to establish himself as a playwright. In January, he is going to give up his job and, as he says, "Play the literary game until he breaks or is broken." He told me he had had a play "almost accepted," and when I asked him what he meant by "almost" he said that he thought by another year he'd get the manager to *read* it. Of course the Hights have to economize like sixty and that's why they happen to be living in what they call "a model tenement." This building was put up originally for working-people and it's mostly filled with them. Eleanor says they're the kind of



people whose correspondence is entirely conducted by picture-postcards, and it is true that the post-boxes are always choked up with them. Moreover, they are such a shifting transient class that an agent collects the rents once a week (six dollars per). Eleanor says it gives her the strangest sensation to be held up every Friday afternoon. She's always forgetting that it's rent-day and having to scramble round for the money among her friends. I should have said that there are a few artists and writers and illustrators and actresses in the house—all exactly as poor as the Hights. They *buy* their gas. That is, they put a twenty-five-cent piece in a slot and when they've used that up they get no "juice," as Tom calls it, if they don't happen to have another quarter. It's the tiniest place I ever was in—you could put the whole apartment down in Mrs. Raeburn's library—a little living-room, a kitchen, bedroom, and bath. Tom and Eleanor are sleeping in the living-room now and have given the bedroom to me. It is such fun—it's a real doll's existence. Eleanor says the Lord certainly tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, for if she had loads of pretty clothes, she would not know where to hang them. The closets are boxes. Why, she can't even buy more than enough food for one meal, the refrigerator—Tom calls it the "jewel-box"—is so tiny. Luckily the place is heated and provided with hot water. The floors are stone, the walls painted yellow. Eleanor says it was perfectly cool there all through the tropical New York summer. Only the moment spring comes, the windows open and every woman in the place puts a cushion on the sill and hangs out the whole afternoon long. Also about forty billion phonographs start up all over the establishment. Eleanor

says the working-man can go without clothes and bread, but he must have a phonograph.

My day here is very different from a day with Mrs. Raeburn. No more motoring, no more teas on the Avenue, no theater at night and supper afterward. But I am enjoying it *exactly as much*—for, mother, tell father I have certainly found Bohemia. But here I am again, plunging right into the midst of things when I should start at the beginning.

This apartment is right near Gramercy Park, which looks exactly like Mecklenburg Square, where our lodgings were in England. I walk through it whenever I can, just to make believe I'm in London again. And in fact, mother, you keep coming across places in New York that are exactly like Europe. Back of Washington Square runs an alley called Washington *Mews*. Doesn't that bring back Thackeray and the Georges to you? There's an armory on Thirty-second Street that has a tower like the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Madison Square Garden makes you think of adorable, arcaded Bologna, especially when the man is feeding the doves there. Washington Square is just like a chunk cut out of the heart of Paris—that is, the north side, but the south side is all Italian. There's a church there exactly like Santa Maria in Cosmedin at Rome. And in the Park—maybe my heart didn't jump when I saw it—is a statue of my beloved Garibaldi—little round cap and all. How I know all this is because Eleanor and I have taken so many long exploring hikes. We walk everywhere, because we both love to walk and we want to be economical. Eleanor is determined not to let me pay for anything, and that being the case I am determined that there shall be nothing to pay

for. Indeed, that's the gorgeous thing about New York. There is so much that you get free—in the way of interesting exhibitions—that you don't need money. And as Eleanor says, the street scene is just like one long circus parade. I am finding out that Fifth Avenue and Broadway aren't all New York—not by any manner of means. I foolishly thought so and I rather think Mrs. Raeburn's set does. At least one of her friends said that she had never ridden on the L, never walked south of Twenty-third, west of Broadway, or east of Lexington Avenue. All I've got to say is she doesn't know what she's missed.

Eleanor has taken me through the various foreign quarters—the Ghetto over on the East Side that's almost as interesting as Naples and certainly *quite* as dirty and noisy, the Italian quarters, Chinatown, and even a Syrian quarter. Best of all, I like Greenwich Village; for that's just like a little piece of Dutchland left over from Colonial times. Eleanor took me to call on a Miss Van Vliet, whose people have lived in the same house for seventy-five years. Eleanor says that she regards anybody who lives in his own house in New York with almost a superstitious reverence. Miss Van Vliet, who's a poetess, says that it's been so strange to watch the skyline come up from nothing and reach higher and higher until it just closed in about her. She said that she had come to feel as if she were in prison and then the Metropolitan Tower began to grow up before her eyes like a marvelous white tree. Finally, one night the great clock suddenly burst into bloom way up high in the sky. She loves that tower—she says it's a thing of beauty from morn till dewy eve—and she loves the clock—she calls it "Moonface." You can't imagine what quaint little shops

we come across in these out-of-the-way places, and what charming, kindly, interesting foreigners keeping them. If people get an idea that New York is all pomp and show and foolish wealth, they are *very much mistaken*. Eleanor says it's just filled and brimming over with ambitious, aspiring young people.

Sometimes late in the afternoon when we haven't anything else to do, we ride across the river in a ferry-boat, returning just as it's getting dark. And if that great bunch of skyscrapers at the tip end of Manhattan—all a-flame and a-glitter as if tinsel paper had been let in at the windows—isn't a fairy vision, then I can't imagine one. Mother, I'm wild about the skyscrapers. If Michael Angelo were to come to New York to-morrow, the first thing he'd do would be to design a skyscraper that would make the Singer Building look like a slice of cheese. You feel as if you were entering a country of Titans and Brodignagians. And it *is* a country of giants! Shivers just go up and down my spine thinking of what a gateway it is and what it opens up to the emigrant. *If you want to get patriotic, mother, come to New York.*

PHOEBE.

DEAREST MOTHER:

Now I'll tell you about Eleanor's friends. They certainly are a most interesting lot. I was mistaken in thinking that Mrs. Raeburn's circle was Bohemia. She says it isn't and she's right. They're all too old and rich and famous up there. But here nobody is old and all are far from rich. As for success—you should hear them talk. The ones that interest me most are Wanda Levvasond, a sculptor, Ellen

Goddard, an actress, Oliver Ogden, a poet, and Carl Schmeiker, a violinist.

Wanda is a marvel—half Russian and all Socialist—with such a voice, so deep and yet so—mother, did you ever hear a voice that sounded *fragrant*? And she's got such great, deep, burning, excited eyes—agate-on-fire if you know what I mean! She took me one day to a class in modeling. There were at least twenty young girls and women, all in long aprons, clustered in a circle about a model-stand on which a young Italian boy was posing. Mother, I went all through Europe and came home to find Hawthorne's "Marble Faun" living on the East Side in New York. When he brushed his curls away from his ears, my heart almost stood still—I expected to see the little pointed tips that would betray him. When I looked at all those clever women, I had something of the feeling that I had in the Latin Quartier in Paris. I wish that I had a gift and a consuming ambition—for that's what Wanda's got. And how do I know but what I have and have never found it? I often think of that. I wish you could have seen the difference in Wanda's work from the rest and the deference with which they all treat her. Every week their teacher gives them out a subject—something abstract like Grief or Fatigue or Joy—or something like The Dance or The Flame. Wanda always brings in two or three studies of the same subject. And she told me she always tries to express the emotion without the aid of a *single* accessory—just by the look in the face and the play of muscles in the body. And she does it, too. But how she works. Such temperament as she's got! I've heard more talk about *temperament* since I've been here! It seems you can't do

much *in any artistic line* without temperament. I asked Tom if he thought I had a temperament, and he said, "I don't know what you call it, Phoebe, but you've got something that bowls us over." I think that's a very queer answer. It sounds like a compliment, but it sort of begs the question.

Ellen Goddard is an actress—at least she's never acted yet; but she's determined to become a star. And somehow I think she'll do it for, apparently, she hasn't another thought in her head. For instance, she reads Shakspeare aloud all the time—not that she expects to play Shakspeare right off, but for the practice in reciting blank verse. She picks out sentences from her reading that are hard to enunciate and spends hours trying to say them so a listener forty miles off would get every syllable. Last winter she exchanged English lessons for French with a girl who's a milliner on Fifth Avenue and this year she's reading Italian with a young boy from the Settlement. She's learned to trim hats and make her own gowns so as to save money. And she exercises *all the time* to keep slim and supple. Now that she's looking for a job, she does anything to earn money—poses for ads and acts for moving-picture machines. Eleanor says that once she took a job as housemaid. Eleanor says she feeds her every time she gets a chance.

Oliver Ogden—whom every one calls Ollie—writes poetry. You talk about starving in a garret for your ideals—that's what he's doing all right. Eleanor says he worries her more than any of them, because you might just as well hope to get a living picking twinkles off the stars as by verse. She says the magazines use poetry only as "fillers."

Isn't that *horrible*, mother? And doesn't it just show how *debased* literature has become in this country? Ollie looks like a daguerreotype. He's pale, with dark eyes and fine dark hair. He's very gentle—you feel almost *too* gentle until he reads his poetry—then you know he's got iron in him somewhere. Don't think he's showing off—he's very modest, really. He reads his—"stuff," as he calls it—because they all beg for it. I told him I didn't know anything about poetry, but when he read his verse I felt just the way I used to feel when I was a child and father read fairy-tales to Ern and me—I saw things and heard things that I couldn't describe. His face lighted up and he said that that was nicer than an acceptance.

Carl Schmeiker is a wonder. I thought I'd heard violinists before but I was mistaken; I never had. Others play *at* the violin. He looks like a young Beethoven—very blonde with a wonderful high, broad forehead and eyes that burn through to your very soul.

When all those six gifted people get going—well, it's the talk of the gods, all right. Eleanor is just as gifted on her critical side as any of them—she's the sanest of the lot. I notice they always ask Eleanor her opinion of everything before they ask the others. Isn't that funny? Eleanor had Mr. and Mrs. Raeburn down to one of her Sunday night suppers. At first, I was afraid it was going to be a failure. For you know how the Raeburns seem to *emanate* luxury. And Mr. Raeburn looks like a captain of industry—he can't help it. But they were both so simple and sweet that after a while the geniuses just forgot all about them and talked Socialism just as if there weren't a plutocrat in their midst—the "co-operative commonwealth,"

the "socialist manifesto," *sabotage* and the rest of it. You should have seen Mr. Raeburn's eyes twinkle and Mrs. Raeburn's eyes shine.

Ellen Goddard was discouraged that day. She had just made the round of the agencies and there was nothing doing as usual. Mrs. Raeburn told her some experiences that Mary Allen, the great English actress, had undergone. They certainly were terrible; and somehow the thought of companionship in misfortune with one so great seemed to make Ellen chirp right up. Mary Allen said, for instance, that she had always wanted to play Juliet and every night for thirty years she looked in her mirror and wondered if she had grown too old. She used to massage her face like mad to keep wrinkles away. When she was forty-five, she played Juliet. The critics all commented on how young she looked, but Mary Allen said her first wrinkle began to grow the night after she opened in Juliet. She said it wasn't because she'd let down *physically* in her care of herself, but because, having achieved her ambition, she'd let down *mentally*.

After that, the geniuses got to telling what they were going to do when they became famous. One lovely thing about them is that, although they're so poor and discouraged, they're all sure they're going to get there some time. And I believe they will, too. But how you have to work to do anything! I used to think it was only a matter of a year or so. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow never made a more profound remark than when he said, "Art is long." It's all of that—and then some. Well—to return to the conversation—Ellen said when she was a star, she wasn't going to hog the stage. She was going to give the young



and ambitious girls in her company plenty of chance. Wanda said she was going to found a scholarship for young sculptors. Ollie said he was going to start a magazine in which there wouldn't be printed one blamed thing but poetry. A good idea, I think, and I bet it would pay! Carl said he was going to give poor students free lessons on the violin. Mrs. Raeburn told them before she left that she hadn't enjoyed anything so much in years. She invited them all to come and see her. And it did occur to me that she might be able to do something for them. The trouble is that none of them will go. Carl says the odor of opulence is fatal to artistry. "What I love about them," Mrs. Raeburn said to me, "is that they're all talking about the future. The people who come to see me are all talking about the past."

No, mother, Sylvia didn't go to Baltimore as she expected. She's at home. I hear from her about every other day. Tug has been going over there quite frequently. She's introduced him to that peachy Ethel Locke—do you remember she came to my party? Tug seems to be going about a lot with her crowd. I leave Eleanor's to-morrow to go to Augusta. I've had such a nice time. At first Eleanor felt badly because she couldn't introduce me to any *eligible* men. As if I cared for men! If you want to know my opinion of them, I think they're an awfully fickle lot.

Your loving,

PHOEBE.

That night, Eleanor came creeping into Phoebe's bed for their last midnight talk.

"Eleanor," Phoebe said, "do you know you've

done a splendid thing for me? You've given me what I most wanted to get in New York—a glimpse into Bohemia."

The effect of this simple recognition of hospitality was extraordinary. Eleanor began to laugh until presently she grew so hysterical that the bed shook. "Please forgive me, Phoebe?" she concluded breathlessly, "but somehow it just struck my sense of humor the right way, your calling *this* Bohemia. Why, my dear, it's about as much Bohemia as it is Lilliput or Arcadia or Valhalla. These people haven't the time nor the energy nor the money to be Bohemians. They're all engaged in a very athletic struggle with the wolf at the door. Sometimes I think that's the trouble with them. They take their ambitions too hard. They're so deadly in earnest. They're too high-brow. It's almost humorless. Tom's the only one who seems to see the funny side of anything. Well, one consolation—they're bound to get there. You can't beat hard work."

"My goodness!" Phoebe said in the humbled tone of mortification, "if this isn't Bohemia, I'd like to know what is?"

Eleanor's last quiver of laughter stopped with a jerk. "As it happens, Phoebe," she said seriously, "you're going right into it. If there ever was an uncrowned queen of Bohemia, Augusta Pugh's it. She lives in the real kingdom—among the happy-go-lucky, down-at-the-elbow, hand-to-mouth, touch-and-go kind—oh, fascinating. I've heard a lot about her from a friend of Tom's. Tom and I always

thought her the cleverest of the 'sob-squad' on 'The Moment' and as for those imaginary interviews she's writing now—I simply eat them up. Which reminds me, Phoebe, will you introduce me to her? You can't possibly want to see Bohemia more than I do."

"Why, I'd be perfectly delighted!" said Phoebe cordially.

#### DEAREST MOTHER:

Here I am with Augusta. And if before I had any doubts about being in Bohemia, I certainly have none now. I'm right in the center of the kingdom, close to the throne and living with what Eleanor calls the "uncrowned queen." The Augusta of the present is very different from the girl I used to know. In the first place, she's improved in her looks. She wears her hair in a wonderful swirl about her head. It is still chestnut-color; but it isn't so fearfully *frizzly* as it used to be. Her eyelids are no longer red and her eyes are a brilliant china-blue. Her complexion is sort of Scotchy—pink and white and freckled. She dresses very simply, always in black and white. She's *boyish-looking*. She's got an air—not self-assured exactly, but as if she were equal to any situation. You'd turn to look at her anywhere. She lives on the south side of Washington Square, in a perfect duck of a room that she calls "The Garret." And it is a garret. It's on the top floor, slant-roofed with a single window, very little-paned and broad-silled, a brick fireplace in which she keeps a roaring fire, and a great long closet which is almost a young garret in itself. It contains a toy sink, a bin for

wood, and many hooks to hang clothes on. Augusta papered "The Garret" herself with wrapping-paper—that tea-with-cream-in-it color. She has pinned up all kinds of sketches on the walls. Most of these sketches were made by her art-student friends and that they are the final and *extreme limit* in queerness, both in line and color, is the mildest thing I can say about them. There are a few shelves which hold books and china and bric-à-brac, and a couch which runs across two sides of the room where we sleep (our toes meeting at the corner), a table, three chairs, and what looks like a slant-top desk. When you pull the slant-top down—what do you suppose you find? *A gas-stove.*

From the window, we get a cat-a-cornered glimpse—between a line of beautifully faded, pinky-red, ivy-hung houses on the north side of the Square—up Fifth Avenue. And if you think that any painter could possibly do justice to that view on a sunny day with the Avenue, a sea of flashing black motors, accented here and there by the great green busses, lumbering along like excited slugs, the yellow taxis scuttling about like distracted beetles and the whole scene dotted with the red motor-numbers—or on *rainy* days when, as Augusta says, the trees in the Park below seem caught like seaweed in a great tide of mist—or at dusk of a damp day when the wet asphalt reflects all the sparkles and shimmers down to the last *glimmer* of a *gleam*—purple electric lights, yellow gas-lights, red tail-lights of the automobiles—or at dusk of a clear night when the Avenue lamps look like pearl sequins embroidered on the sky, with the office-buildings all illuminated and glittery and Moonface shining round and gold near the top of the beautiful white

column of the tower—well, I tell you, he couldn't—not even if he were *Velasquez*.

But here I am wasting time on a view, when I've done so much and seen so much that life has become a sort of scrimmage of experience. Augusta lives in a *perfect whirl*. In the first place, we get up any old time, eat when it occurs to us, and never at the same place twice, go to bed—well, generally when there's nothing else to do—although it's very hard to find a time when there's nothing doing in the New York that *Augusta* knows. Either Augusta gets the breakfast in the chafing-dish or we go to a little café a few doors away. Then, often we market or shop. If we buy meat, we go to a fat-faced, rosy-cheeked, golden-mustached German butcher—who joshes us in beautiful broken English without a *T* or a *W* anywhere in it. We buy groceries of a person Augusta calls “the yid” and he is certainly the politest man I ever met in my life. If we want fruit, Augusta takes me to “the wop,” the handsomest Italian I ever saw—with a wife who looks like a madonna, a baby who looks like a Raphael cherub, and a picturesque old father who must have been a “hooker” in Venice. Twice while I have been here, Augusta has had to buy extra china—for company. We bought the first set off “the chink” down in Chinatown and the second set off “the Jap” on Fifth Avenue. And she is having a chair that belonged to her grandmother re-upholstered by an old Frenchman who has the manners of a marquis. Augusta says that sometime she's going to write a story called “The Alien,” about a boy who was brought up in New York and never met an American until he went to Boston.

After we've done our shopping and marketing, we come back and Augusta writes. Later we go to Park Row (the downtown Newspaper Row) or to the Second Flat-Iron (the uptown Newspaper Row). Downtown is wonderful. The buildings are so high and so solid—somehow you get the impression that, in the beginning, Manhattan was streaked with parallel cliffs of stone and that the architects carved the buildings out of them. And yet, every now and then, you'll come across little wooden houses that are so quaint and Dutchy you just love them on sight. The roar in the downtown streets is tremendous—Augusta says it's like Niagara. And at noon, when the entire working population turns out onto the sidewalks, you experience a sensation that I simply can't describe—it's so *polyglot*. It frightens you; for you feel as if there never were any Pilgrims and Puritans and that the Declaration of Independence must have been a dream. As for Wall Street—well, not since I saw the Vatican in Rome have I got such an impression of mystery and power.

When we go to the "Times" Building, we always walk up Broadway. I love that. When I was with the Raeburns, I saw Broadway only at night. Augusta says that that is a very *hectic* aspect of New York life. But in the daytime it's perfectly marvelous—that is, if you have a guide like Augusta, whose newspaper experiences have brought her into contact with all kinds of strange people. She points them out to me faster than I can look at them—actors, actresses, show-girls, chorusers, "broilers," opera people, vaudevillians, managers, playwrights, politicians, millionaires, detectives. Once she called my attention to a gentle-looking, white-haired man and asked me to guess his

profession. I said an actor or a clergyman. She said he was a very famous confidence-man—Billy Whaley.

Sometimes we visit magazine-offices; for Augusta writes fiction also. When we went into the first editorial sanctum, I had the surprise of my life—for the editor was a *young* man. More than that he was a perfect dear, with such *nice* eyes. He asked me how I liked New York. And when I told him my impressions he asked me if I wouldn't write them for him just the way I said them. Of course I said *no*, and I guess I never was so frightened in my life. I don't know why it is, but when anybody says the word *editor* to me, I always think of Demosthenes. And I get a sort of mental picture of a venerable old man with a long white beard. But Augusta says that none of the editors in New York are venerable and there are at least three for whom she will bear an unrequited affection to her grave. Goodness, if I'd known that, I'd have taken up a literary career myself. I told Augusta about meeting Blanche Hokeby, and she said, "Just think, she gets ten cents a word. Pirate!" It seems they pay by the word. That being the case, you bet I'd run in tons of extra *ands* and *whens* and *ifs* and *buts*, wouldn't you, mother dearest?

We have lunch wherever we happen to be. Then, late in the afternoon, Augusta's "gang," as she calls them, begin to rally around her. I pause here to take a long breath. I don't know how I'm going to describe these people to you. For they might be *bogles* and *brownies* and *trolls* and *nymphs* and *nixies* and *genies* and *gnomes* and *mermaids* for all the resemblance they bear to anybody we know in Maywood. In the first place, they aren't half so grown up as little Gracie Seaver. They have no more sense of responsi-

bility than so many white mice. They work at all kinds of things—that is, when they do anything—which is, Augusta says, only when they can't "beg, borrow, or steal a meal off somebody else." It seems that this is the art-student end of town—billions of them have studios in or about MacDougal Alley. They come—girls and men—piling over every afternoon. I couldn't begin to enumerate them. Then a lot of actresses out of a job visit here. I've come to the conclusion that half the population of New York is looking for work and the majority of them are stage-folk. Besides that, there are a whole lot of people whom Augusta meets in her newspaper work. And then——

But I guess this will have to be all for now, for I'm tired.

Your loving,

PHOEBE.

DEAREST MOTHER:

I have begun to get the people who come to Augusta's unmixed and to pick out from them the most interesting. Of all I think I like Dick Baker best. Augusta says that he would be the greatest reporter in the world, if he weren't a "booze-artist." Mother, that means he drinks too much—isn't it dreadful? He's the kindest, sweetest, gentlest, loveliest being you ever saw—half Irish. He tells us stories about his assignments and, always, he's so sympathetic with the people in the case—no matter how wicked and cruel they've been. Why, I always thought reporters were perfectly heartless. But I couldn't be afraid of Dick Baker any more than I could of you. I'd tell him positively *any-*



*thing* that he wanted to know. Augusta says that's the way everybody feels about him and that's why he's such a wonderful reporter—that, taken with the fact that New York has never made him the least bit hard or cynical or bitter.

Then, there's a newspaper woman that I adore—a great big creature, named Molly Edwards—who must have been handsome once and still has a smile that—well, I know the heart doesn't beat that could resist that smile. Everybody loves her and everybody takes care of her. She has no faculty whatever for looking out for herself. "What will become of her when she gets old?" I asked. "Well," Augusta said, "I've given up worrying about Molly. She may end her days in a poorhouse, it is true. On the other hand, she is just as likely to marry a millionaire. She refused one last summer."

There are four boy-artists who come here who entertain me enormously. Oh, mother, they are so funny! They live in one small studio together; each has a corner. They call one the "cowboy" artist, the second, the "bulldog" artist, the third, the "pretty-girl" artist, and the last, the "ship" artist. And the way they josh and jolly each other—mother, it's a perfect *wheeze*! They have to keep their various belongings under their beds because there's no other place for them. The "pretty-girl" artist told me that the "cowboy" artist prefers to keep his *on* his bed, where he can get at them easily. He says that there are all kinds of cowboy things there—a saddle, high boots, a Stetson hat, "chaps," a slicker, lassos, guns of every description—it's simply crowded with them. The "cowboy" artist is too lazy to take any of them off when he goes to bed, so he just *worms* himself under the clothes and sleeps

with all that truck *on* him—and sleeps like a baby. Can you *beat* it?

The four women who interest me most, next to Molly Edwards, are Angela Ade, Jane Daly, Ruthie Stanley, and “Jimmie” Tench.

Angela is a suffragette. Oh, mother, she’s simply *hot* on the subject—and what she doesn’t know about it would hardly fill a thimble. She’s taken me to a lot of suffrage meetings and if it hasn’t been a *revelation!* Why, I always thought that suffragists were *queer* people that you’d hate to have round. But in New York, all kinds of women are suffragists—even society women. In fact, it’s *the thing* to be a suffragette. And when you come down to it, mother, taxation without representation *is* tyranny and there’s no going back of *that*. Why, Angela can get right up at any time and address a meeting. She’s talked from soap boxes on the street. She’s marched in the suffrage parade and picketed in East Side strikes and been *arrested*. She’s very little and blonde and frail and delicate, but with such fire—she looks like an angel but an angel with a temper—if you know what I mean.

Jane Daly is what Augusta calls an “actorine.” She is so pretty and fascinating that I cannot keep my eyes off of her—the darlinest little slim figure, great big mischievous brown eyes and a nose that turns *right* up. She can imitate anybody or anything on the earth that she’s ever seen. She’s been all over this country. And last year she saved up enough money to go abroad on the cheap,—and went—explored London and Paris all by herself. Did you ever hear anything like her courage? Why, mother, when I compare myself with some of these girls, I feel

ashamed, I'm so useless. Jane is out of an engagement now—so she's posing for the "pretty-girl" artist. I asked her if it wasn't wonderfully inspiring and stimulating going about and seeing the managers when she's out of a job. And she said, "Pardon me if I seem to give you the haw-haw, *but*——" Mother, she said if there was anything she hated and loathed it was going to interview a manager—she *despised* it. And if she had her way, all theaters would be subsidized by the government and managers would be *abolished*.

Ruthie Stanley is a girl-editor. That is to say, she's assistant editor on "To-morrow." She is a great big, stunning-looking brunette creature, like a Greek statue that's been dipped in coffee. I asked her if authors weren't the most wonderful people in the world, and she said, "Not unless you say it quick." Mother, I never was so disillusioned in my life. She says that writers are just as fond of money as anybody else and perhaps *more so*. She says they'll haggle over a few cents in a perfectly disgraceful way and *their word means nothing*. Why, I had always supposed that people wrote for the love of their art and that they considered it a privilege to give their work to the world. I wish you could have heard Ruthie roar when I said that. She said they wouldn't give an "and" or a "but" or a "when" to save the entire sidereal system from destruction.

"Jimmie" Tench is a woman press-agent. She is big and comfortable and soft-voiced and maternal-looking—my idea of a trained nurse. And oh, mother, you can have no idea what a clever person she is and how hard she has to work. She seems to know every newspaper man and every actor



Sometimes when the "gang" is here we have dinner in  
"The Garret."

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and actress in New York. When I asked her if it wasn't wonderful meeting actors and actresses all the time, she asked me to excuse her while she fainted away for a moment. Then she said if she had her choice, she would never lay eyes again on anything that had any connection with the theater whatever—not even the people who printed the programs.

Well, mother, when Augusta gets to railing against editors and Jane against managers and Ruth Stanley against authors and "Jimmie" against actors—it is certainly one grand knock-fest. It quite troubled me for awhile until I spoke of it to Eleanor. And Eleanor says that the reason is that you naturally distrust anybody with whom you have financial dealings. She says she doesn't know why it is, but there is something about *money* that brings out the worst that's in people.

I should have told you, by the way, that I had Eleanor to tea and that she and Augusta immediately took a great fancy to each other. Everybody here likes Eleanor. She's so pretty and clever and efficient and wise. Then her clothes are so smart; she's posing for half the artists—they're crazy about the way she dresses.

Sometimes when the "gang" is here, we have dinner in "The Garret." In that case, everybody takes hold and helps cook—men and women alike. The men put aprons on or pin towels round their necks and wash the dishes and clean up as a matter of course. On that score, I can recommend a Bohemian husband—he is certainly a handy thing to have about the house. And oh, what good things we have to eat. When I get home I am going to cook some Italian spaghetti and some Hungarian goulashes that will

make your hair curl. If we go out to dinner—and we can only by pooling all the money in the crowd—we go to a different place every night. I have gone to a Chinese restaurant where I ate chop suey until I was ashamed of myself, to a Turkish restaurant where all the food tasted as if it had been perfumed and was delicious beyond description, to a German restaurant where the food was so much easier to eat than to pronounce that I can't tell you anything about it, to a Hungarian restaurant where the wine was changed with every course and you served yourself from an extraordinary glass arrangement at the end of the table, to a French restaurant where there were *forty* billion *hors d'œuvres*, to an Italian restaurant where—I guess I like the Italian cooking best, although the chicken does taste like a warmed-over hot-water bottle and the salad does look as if it had been out all night in the rain. But the soup and the macaroni and the zambayone, oh, how I love it! We sit in the restaurant all the evening having a good time. Sometimes we go to bed at twelve, sometimes later. Once it was two. Now don't let father worry about that; for, mother, there is not one of these people that you would not like. And you'd love poor Dick Baker, the "booze-fighter." For no woman could help loving and pitying him. Augusta says it is only a question of Dick Baker's finding the right girl before it is too late. They made me realize all of a sudden what an influence a woman can have over a man. My goodness, it's marvelous! I have thought so many times that if I were a man I'd ask Dick Baker to come over to Maywood and stay until he got straightened out. But of course a girl can't do a thing like that.

I *am* enjoying myself, mother dearest. My month is

nearly up, but I may stay longer. I guess I'd better finish this letter now. It's very late and I've just found a letter from Sylvia among my mail. Somehow I always feel like answering her letters the moment I get them—she has so much news about my friends—Tug and Ethel Locke and the others.

Your loving,

PHOEBE.

As Phoebe picked up her letter, Augusta suddenly stopped banging her typewriter and leaned back in her chair.

"Augusta," Phoebe said impulsively, "do you know I'm having an awfully good time here? This is the first time in my life that I've ever lived in Bohemia. I don't know but what I'll find something to do here in New York and stay on all winter. Father won't object, I know. I wouldn't be surprised if I could make something of myself in this atmosphere. I'm sure I could write stories as good as some I see in the magazines."

As she spoke, Phoebe's fingers pulled mechanically at the flap of her letter, tore it open. Before Augusta answered, her eyes mechanically ran through the opening lines:

DEAR PHOEBE:

Tug's state of mind is certainly improving. Ethel Locke has invited him to go on a motoring, week-end excursion with them. He hasn't said yes, yet. But I think he will. I'm urging him to do it. Ethel's crowd is such a jolly one and she's so bright herself. She——



Augusta's long slender hands were smoothing her brow. Her oval finger-tips came to rest for an instant on her tired eyelids. When she removed them, her eyes gleamed bright with decision.

"Phoebe," she said, "I've been dying to have a talk with you ever since you've been here. And I'm going to get it off my chest now, if you don't mind. In the first place, perhaps you remember that when you wrote to me, it was over a week before I replied to your letter. That wasn't press of work, as I said. It was mostly because I didn't want to see you. Do you know, way back when we were girls together, I was jealous of you—horribly jealous? Not so much of your looks, although you were pretty nearly as much of a pippin then as you are now. Nor of your abilities, for I was your equal there. But because Tug Warburton had a case on you. I was crazy about Tug, myself, in those days. If I could have got him away from you, I would have—without a scruple. But I couldn't. I don't apologize now for that. For most girls are bounders and most boys cads. A code of honor develops only with character and experience."

Augusta paused a moment. Then her hands went behind her head and clasped there. She sank into a position of greater ease.

"You know what happened. After two years at college, I went to work for a Boston newspaper. Then I came to New York. I've never seen Tug since until he came on two months ago. Then I met him on the street. I'd never forgotten him.

For a reason that I'll tell you later, I wanted to find out whether I was infatuated with him or not. I invited him to call. He came. I invited him again. He came again. The long and the short of it was that we went to dinner or to the theater every night of his stay here. Don't get any impression that Tug was flirting with me. He wasn't. But don't get any impression that I wasn't flirting with Tug. I was—like a house afire. It was plain to me what the situation was. You had just thrown him down—he was as blue as indigo. Not that he told me a word of this. It was what he didn't tell me that flashed the signal."

Augusta suddenly abandoned her easy attitude. She bent forward, her long slim hands folded. "Now I'll tell you why I flirted with him. There's a reporter on 'The Moment' who's been asking me to marry him. I wouldn't say yes until I was sure I was all through with the Tug infatuation. I proved that to myself all right, and I'm going to get married in June. I'm going to cut out all this footless life and take a little place over in Jersey and make a big editor of him. I can do it. *He's* a person. I'm only mediocre, you know. I write fiction, but very bad fiction. But, working in harness with him, I can pull off something big and I know it. Now, Phoebe, I've been frank about myself. I'm going to be frank about you. You're not a genius any more than I am. You're a true sport and a thoroughbred and you've got personality, but you're only an average girl, after all. Here in New

York you wouldn't be one-two-three with the big people that are coming all the time. You go back to Maywood and marry a Maywood man. You'll be a power in that town. You'll run it socially—and you'll do a heap of good. You'll accomplish things as you never could here. I'm going to tell you one more thing—not because I'm impertinent, but because I like you. I didn't make a dent on Tug—I couldn't. He's still in the condition where you've scratched off every other woman's face for him. He's like that idiot in 'As You Like It' who kept calling, 'Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe!' But I got one thing out of it, and I'm telling it to you, Phoebe, so you won't make any mistake. *The next attractive girl who goes out after Tug is going to get him. See?* ”

For several minutes Phoebe did not speak. Augusta stared at her. Under the tangle in her brow, Phoebe's look was riveted on the further wall as if she saw, in letters of fire, some grim warning written there. The silence became thick, almost tangible. Then suddenly, Phoebe broke it. “Augusta,” she said simply, “thank you.”

“That's all right,” Augusta said in an offhand way. And a little later, as if to change the subject, she added, “Oh, by the way, Phoebe, that's all dead wrong, that idea you've got that this is Bohemia. It isn't. You have to have something on you to be a Bohemian, and none of these people have any real abilities or any real ambition. Bohemia is the land of big people who've found themselves. Did you

ever read about that crowd Zola collected—the De Goncourts and De Maupassant and the rest? That's my idea of Bohemia—genius tested and sure of itself. Oh, I'll tell you who lives in a real, a perfect Bohemia. That's your friend, Mrs. Raeburn. Say, I'd love to know her, Phoebe. Will you take me there some time? ”

“ Why, I'd be perfectly delighted,” said Phoebe cordially.

DEAREST FATHER AND MOTHER:

Do you know what Bohemia is? It's what you haven't got. Do you know where Bohemia is? It's where you don't live. It's anything but what you have, any place but where you are. Do you know what most looks like Bohemia to me now? *Maywood*. And you two are the king and queen of it. I'm coming back on the ten o'clock limited to-morrow to live forever in my Bohemia.

PHOEBE.

P.S.—I wrote Tug to come in with the machine to bring me home. I'll be there about five.

## CHAPTER IV

### ERNEST LAYS DOWN HIS ARMS

**D**EAREST SYLVIA:

Mother got a letter from Ern last night in which he announced that he was going to bring four boys home from Princeton for the Easter vacation. Ordinarily it lasts only from the Thursday before Easter until the Monday after; but by a system of saving up cuts, they've spread it into a week. With Ern, that makes five kid-boys in the house. *Five*—count 'em—FIVE. Isn't it sickening? I feel as if I were taking in kindergartens to train. For, like you, Sylvia, I have nothing but indifference and an amused contempt for boys. However, they needn't interfere one atom with you and me. In the first place, boys of that age generally hate girls; but if the little beasts show the faintest sign of taking notice, I guess I can hand them the best freezing-out act ever seen on this or any other stage. And you, too, Sylvia, my love, can turn a *pretty handy trick* with the ice-pitcher.

Mother and I have talked it over, and we've put five cots in the big room at the top of the house—the one we call the Gym. It looks like a hospital ward. You and I will have the floor below all to ourselves. We will breakfast in my room. Then you can work all morning on your thesis. I'll bring your lunch up to you—I have a great pull with Flora. And the girls will probably invite

us out to dinner so often that we won't have to see the kindergarten only now and then.

Yours disgustedly,

PHOEBE.

"Say, Mart," said Cinders, addressing Ernest Martin, the night before the quintette left Princeton, "do I understand that you guarantee this expedition to the home of your ancestors to be absolutely non-fussing, as it were, so to speak, nevertheless *and* notwithstanding?"

"Child, you guess the truth," Ernest reassured him; "it is to be skirtless. In the words of the bard, there will be lack of woman's weeping, there will be lack of woman's tears."

"Io triumphe, banzai, hail, hip, hip, hip and loud cheers!" said Cinders.

Red-headed was Cinders—little and clever, always asking questions, and usually answering them himself.

"How can it be skirtless," Sandy Williston remarked, "if you have a sister?"

Sandy was long, lank, and preternaturally solemn as to full black eyes behind huge round glasses. He now turned the double glare of his convex gaze on a picture of Phoebe, which, framed in an oval of gold, had appeared in Ernest's room at Christmas-time. The others looked at it also, and with varying degrees of a premeditated indifference. As it happened, their semi-circular group had made it the center of tri-weekly smoke-talks. And as they puffed, they considered it.

The picture—the last cry in fashionable photography—represented a slender girl in an evening-dress and huge lacy mob-cap. Perhaps—was it a trick of the artisan—the innocent big eyes were a little sad, the prettily-curved mouth a little drooped. And certainly the feminine note had been emphasized and accented. The portrait included, for instance, such details as toy-hands concealed by gloves, long, soft, prettily-wrinkled and holding a rose, the tip of a satin slipper pointing from under a swirl of skirt. It included such feminine properties nearby as an evening-coat draped over her chair, a triangular object that was a half-opened fan, a square of lace masquerading as a handkerchief. But, on the whole, the figure of a robust litheness, a delicate muscularity, connoted spirit, impulse and enthusiasm.

Ernest glanced at the picture, too, and realized for the first time since he placed it on the wall that it still hung there. Also, in passing he was hit with the wonder that always struck him when he saw that other men considered a man's sister as a *girl*. To Ernest, the female sex divided itself automatically into two departments, his mother and Phoebe in one, the rest of created women in the other. "Oh, *Phoebe!*" he said in a careless voice. "Phoebe is not like other girls. She won't bother us any. I tell you when a girl has brothers, she soon learns to leave his men-friends alone."

"It is my opinion that none of them don't never learn to peacefully leave nobody alone," said Sandy. Sandy was a little older than the rest. He dealt



“Oh, *Phoebe!*” he said in a careless voice. “Phoebe is not like other girls. She won’t bother us any.”



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deliberately in the double negative and the split infinitive. This gave an effect of verbal mutilation to his conversation. But that was as nothing to the insurgent quality given by his cynicism to his opinions. Sandy had weighed woman in the balance and found her wanting. He made general statements about her.

"There are exactly one hundred reasons why girls are unfit for human companionship," said Art Turner. "The first is that they're women, and the other ninety-nine are that they aren't men."

Art Turner, thin as a whip-cord, pompadoured and acidulous, was given to epigram. He looked about him now with the pardonable pride of one who has struck off a neat thing.

"That isn't it," said Cinders, who was nothing if not concrete. "The trouble with the females of the species is that they have no stuffing in their skulls. They are empty in the garret and vacant in the belfry. That is, if they're lookers. There must be some of them who have ideas, for you hear about them at the women's colleges. But there you are again! If they go to college, they are freaks. To find at one time, contiguous and adjacent, contemporaneous and consanguineous, a skirt that is good-looking and can talk sense to a man—it can't be done. That kind is a paradox. It doesn't happen—that's all. And damfiknow why, either."

"My brother said there was a college girl came to Rouncewell Center last summer that was a peach-erine, and the niftiest bunch of calico there," remarked Al Lawson.

Al Lawson was a slender, shy, poetic-looking lad—blond. He spoke now in a casual kind of way, but as one who will see justice done.

"Did you see her yourself?" Cinders asked with disconcerting abruptness.

"No," admitted Al.

"That's it. There are always rumors that sometime, somewhere, somebody saw a good-looking college-girl. It's like the Flying Dutchman or the *fata morgana* or the *esprit de corps* or the *zeit-geist*—you never see it yourself. Take it from me, if women are pippins, there are TO LET signs in their think-halls, and if they have brains, their faces have once been stepped on."

Ernest seemed to agree to all this by an approving silence. He would have died rather than raise the faintest peep of dissent. But mentally it made him writhe, and physically it made him flush, to imagine what the others would say if they guessed the true state of affairs. For in the last year Ernest had undergone a complete change of opinion in regard to this girl question. He supposed that his experience was new in the history of masculine consciousness. It never occurred to him that Sandy, Cinders, Al, Art, *et al.* might be passing through the same psychological change. And if it had been suggested to him that, in the foregoing conversation they were trying, by concerted whistling, to keep their courage up, he would have flouted the theory.

As to Ernest's surprising face-about, many were the reasons thereof. First of all, there was the in-

evitable one of mental growth, of wider social experience in college life, of constant contact with the world of girls. But allying itself with the main current flowed many minor streams. Vide:

By accident, Ernest had become identified in his college course with a group of men professedly "literary" in taste and ambition. The accident was his personal lovability, the unexpected plasticity and adaptability which, in his High School days, had made him the leader of his intellectual betters, and would, doubtless, always insure him their companionship. He had become a little touched with the literary spirit. First and last, he had heard a great deal of literary talk at college—discussions of authors, plots, atmospheres, influences, the technique of style. He reeled off with astonishing glibness the patter of his sophomoric tribe. He read more poetry than ever before in his life—Byron, Shelley, Keats, Verlaine, Heine—and he was absolutely unconscious that it was his crowd who really translated it all to him. Latterly, Goethe had become the god, Wilhelm Meister the hero of his mind-world. Indeed, Ernest had discovered many extraordinary resemblances between himself and Wilhelm Meister—but this was one of the things that he never told his friends.

One or two of Ernest's group were destined to go the whole weary way of authorship to a modest success. They all thought that it was the brilliant and cynical Sandy who was to become their class-pride—but in point of fact it was the inquisitive,

tough, and self-sufficient Cinders. Sandy was destined, after traveling a few years in the interests of his father's shoe business, to settle down comfortably to fat and affluence. So Ernest was to take up his father's trail, to become an able business man and a solid citizen. But for the moment the glamour of the writing atmosphere was on him. Visions of Grub Street beckoned and allured. He was beginning to let his thoughts run fictionwards. He even tried his secret hand at verse.

Following on the advice of his preceptor and in the footsteps of genius, Ernest now carried a notebook—number 5. It bore the proud title WOMEN—THEIR FAULTS AND FRAILTIES. And Ernest was convinced that he would fill it with the subtleties of a Balzac-like study of the sex. But, somehow, though its predecessors filled up rapidly enough, stuffed as they were with Sandy's general cynicisms, Cinders' concrete observations, Al's epigrams, and Art's questions, number five seemed to languish. And yet it had started with a bang—in a statement arrogant enough to predicate an endless flow of eloquence.

"WOMAN," Ernest wrote, "IS NOT ONLY THE CONSERVATIVE; SHE IS THE REACTIONARY FORCE IN LIFE. SHE IS NOT OF THE FUTURE. SHE IS NOT EVEN OF THE PRESENT. SHE IS OF THE PAST. SHE IS THE DETERRENT, THE DETERIANT [*Ernest was very proud of that bit of word-carpentry*] OF PROGRESS. WOMAN DELIBERATELY BLINDFOLDS US AND THEN LEADS US BACK."

The remark still glared up at him, alone and unsupported, from the first page.

He had reasons, other than literary, to urge him to the study of concrete woman. For the world of his mind was now haunted, and haunted by a being unmistakably of the woman-kind, a being whom he had never seen, and thus could not name. Perhaps for our purposes, the label *Ideal* will best serve. It was not that Ernest ever consciously exorcised her. She *appeared*—that was it—she appeared. At first there was a sense of shock about it as if, entering his room suddenly, he had surprised an alien thing there—a creature beautiful but yet faery—a ghost-being who blew out like a candle the moment he looked at her. At first she came rarely. Now she came often, whenever he was mentally vacant and idle, the fifteen minutes of lying awake at night before his heavy, quickly-descending sleep eclipsed her, the three minutes of delicious dozing in the morning before his cold shower banished her, the intervals in between of lonely walking.

Sometimes even when people were actually about, talking, laughing, he would catch a glimpse of its ghost-occupant, not near, but far-away in the dimly-lighted reaches of his mind. And then his thought, taking the bit in its mouth, would go galloping—galloping—galloping—lightly but swiftly galloping—galloping—off—away—on—and on—always pursuing and never catching up.

It tantalized Ernest to the verge of irritation that he had never seen her face. Or was that the fascina-

tion of it? And yet—here was a strange thing about it—in spite of her aloofness, he had a vision, vaguely actual, of her.

She was a contradictory creature, full at the same time of bubbling, sparkling spirits and strange vague languors, a creature of soft curves and iron muscles. She had the body of woman, the spirit of man. She was compact of the various beauties he had noticed in others. Her long floating hair was thick, wing-like with jet-black curls. Those curls were the curls of Fay Faxon, the first girl Ernest had ever consciously looked at. Her eyes were the twin star blacknesses of a young girl-actor whose Boston openings Ernest had tried never to miss. Her mouth had the curved, tragic contours of an Italian poetess whose picture Ernest had once cut from a magazine. Her expression—but, here, always she evaded him.

Ernest caught himself surreptitiously studying the faces of women nowadays. For, just as he found other women in *her*, he found *her* in other women. His occasional excursions to New York gave him plenty of opportunity for this furtive identification. The New York streets surged with women. And many of them looked twice, and some of them with a smile and a flash of invitation, at the sturdy, broad-shouldered lad whose skin under its coat of tan should have been so white, and whose eyes, through their lingering adolescent sulkiness, so clear. One moment the expression of the Ideal flashed the brune, piquant, pointed sauciness of the girl who had blown

a horn in his ear election night. Again it softened to the velvety languors of the woman who, at an Italian table-d'hôte, had stared at him through the magic curtain of the smoke from her cigarette—a young seeress with eyes like moons. Sometimes it had the look of wonder, the shyest and gentlest, the most innocent and tender, of a portrait study that he once saw hanging in a Fifth Avenue window. Once it had the handsome militant sternness of a young suffragette, whom his crowd stopped to “josh” as, humorously but with passion, she harangued a crowd in Union Square. Always it had the olive, oblique, enigmatic quality of the woman in the illustrations to books of eastern travels. And yet, curiously enough, embodied orient that she was, she was all Spain and all Italy, she was all Athens and all Rome.

Translating her into the people of fiction, she was the Rosalind of Shakespeare, the Rebecca of “Ivanhoe,” the Judith of “Deerslayer,” she was the Lorna Doone of his favorite novel, the Mignon of his latest god. Translating her into the terms of real life, she was the two Stellæ, Sidney’s and Swift’s, she was Mary Shelley, Claire Clairmont, Fannie Brawne and Bettina von Arnim.

Of all the things that she *was*, he remained uncertain, except that she was tropically dark and orientally curved. Of one thing she was *not*, he was absolutely certain. She differed in every particular from the Maywood girl, the type of which Phoebe so perfectly represented. The Maywood girl was clean-drawn, cut-out, crisply carved, and clearly col-



ored, a flesh-and-blood, bread-and-butter creature. The Ideal was shadowy, satiny, melting, of the sun and the wind, and yet a creature for poetry and the rhapsodies of confidence in the twilight and under the moon.

"What kind of skirts are the Maywood girls?" asked Cinders.

"Oh, just like other girls," Ernest answered.

"Well, are there many of them?"

"Oodles!" Ernest was laconic. "Each the exact duplicate of the other. All made in Grand Rapids."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Cinders, touching the depths of dejection. "Already I see her face. Already I hear her talk."

"Well, what's the use of thinking about it?" Ernest burst out impatiently. "You won't see any of them. There's only my sister, who, as I tell you, is trained to leave men alone. To be sure, she's going to have a friend staying there for a few days—a Radcliffe girl, Sylvia Gordon. But Phoebe says she's so busy working on a thesis that she won't have time even to eat with us. Which reminds me that I'll have to take an hour or two, here and there, to whack that essay of mine into shape. But you needn't be scared, I won't sick any girls on to you. When I guarantee you that we don't fuss, we *don't* fuss. See! You can't possibly hate to have girls round more than I do. Now this is to be the program of the week's games and sports. Weather permitting, we'll have tennis—perhaps some golf.

Nights we'll beat it into Boston to shows. If it rains, day-times we'll bum round the city, seeing what we can see. You needn't look a female in the face during the entire week."

"What sort of a girl is this Gordon girl?" Cinders asked.

"What a foolishness!" Ernest commented. "No girl is ever any different from any other girl. She's girl—that's all—just girl! Phoebe thinks she's the whole cheese. Come to think of it, she *is* pretty plucky. She's worked her way through Radcliffe—though after the first year she got a scholarship. When Phoebe met her, she was waiting on table at a hotel in Marblehead. My father and mother think she's a corker. But this will be about all along this line. Have we no more intelligent subjects for conversation?"

Ernest's program gave every evidence of a conscientious intention to fulfil itself. Arriving just before dinner at the big old-fashioned house set in the midst of lawn and garden, the Princetonians found a family of three awaiting them.

The handsome gentleman, stout, slightly florid and iron-gray, who was Ernest's father, welcomed them cordially. Like the thoroughbred that he was, he piled their plates so full at the go-off that they did not have to come up for more than two extra helps. The tall, thin woman, soft-eyed and gray-haired, who was Ernest's mother—and who exactly met the sophomoric ideal of a mother—welcomed them cordially, too. She did not seem to notice the

disappearance of three square yards of steak and, with the pudding, of a salad-bowl-full of hard sauce. Her guests did not notice either that at the conclusion of the meal she went to the telephone. "I want to add to my order, Mr. Jellup, three dozen more eggs, a dozen more chops, two more chickens, and all the cream you can spare me for the next week." The startling young person, so magnificently handsome, so magnificently stately, so magnificently haughty, who was Mart's sister, also welcomed them. But hardly with cordiality. Her Majesty—Cinders immediately dubbed her that—never lifted her eyelashes—they were long, dark, and level—above the height of their ties.

Her Majesty—otherwise Phoebe Martin—disappeared as soon as dinner was over, joining, they conjectured, the mysterious "grind" upstairs whom Cinders christened "the Captive."

For two days, the quintette lived a life ideally masculine, in an Eden virtually Eveless. Her Majesty and the Captive breakfasted and lunched together upstairs. Both nights they went elsewhere for dinner. Once or twice, filing downstairs, the boys heard twin peals of girlish laughter ascending and descending the scale of girlish mirth. Every mother's son of them wondered in his secret heart if he were not the object of that heartless humor. Indeed, it was immediately after this that Cinders said, "By jiminy, Mart, it certainly is great the way you've cut out the female proposition for us. You wouldn't think there was a girl in this town."

And then, to Ernest's great disgust, his whole scheme of masculine segregation blew up, burst, and disappeared before his very eyes. And the god in this infernal machine of chance was the person whom he had most reason to trust—his mother.

Returning from the theater, Ernest noiselessly guided the car up to the Martin gate just as the town-clock struck twelve. At that identical moment, the Martin door opened and disgorged what Cinders afterward described as "all the girls in the world and then some." Subtracting hyperbole and substituting exact statistic, it let out Her Majesty, a spark of mischief in her gray eyes big enough to melt the last icicle of her manner. It let out Molly Tate, a little bud of femininity, flaxen and demure. It let out the Gould twins, slender, brown, diabolic in their coquetry, as alike as paired pearls, except that, as Cinders sapiently remarked, "each was prettier than the other." It let out Mrs. Martin, who said in a relieved voice, "Oh, there you are, Ernie, at last. You can take the girls home in the car."

"All right, mother," said Ernest. "Say, fellers," he went on, sacrificing himself nobly, "you beat it upstairs. I won't be gone but fifteen minutes."

But, to his intense disgust and anxiety, the boys lingered, helping to pack the girls in the motor. Out of his own experience, Ernest could have told them that that was like playing with a trap whose working you do not understand. And Phoebe, traitor that she was, egged them on. You never

could depend on any female, Ernest reflected bitterly, not even a sister, to play your game. And then, at the last moment, on one excuse or another, the Princetonians leaped into the car, sitting on the floor, standing on the running-board, hanging on by their eyelids generally. They proceeded to "jolly" the feminine half of the cargo until their rush through the night trailed, like a banner, a continuous peal of girl-giggles. Not only that—and decidedly, Ernest did not think this was playing fair—when they reached Molly Tate's house, they prevailed on her to see the Gould girls home. Arriving five minutes later at the Gould place, they wheedled the twins into seeing Molly home. By a clever prolongation of this system, they saw Molly home six times and the twins five. Finally, to Ernest's relief, feminine rebellion asserted itself over feminine pliability.

"I tell you, fellers, what let's do to-day," Ernest said the next morning, "you haven't any of you been to——"

"Oh, see here, Mart," Cinders interrupted, "if you don't mind, I guess I won't go motoring this morning. You see, last night, that Miss Tate got to talking tennis with me—say, what sort of a game does she play, Mart?"

"Rattling for a girl," Ernest replied with enthusiasm. "She and Phoebe won the ladies' doubles here."

"Well, she's crazy to learn that Lawford stroke—says she can't get it. And she's going into a

tournament this summer. I said if the weather was good this morning, I'd get over and teach her."

"I was just about to say, Mart," Sandy Williston said in deep chest tones, "that I've got to cut this expedition out, too. I was speaking about that glass-flowers exhibition over at Harvard and your sister said she could take me through blindfold. Her exact words were that 'forty billion Harvard men had forced the glass flowers on her.' That's one thing I ought to do while I'm here, you know. So if you don't mind——"

"Well, as long as you fellers are cutting out the Hub of the Universe," Art remarked eagerly, "I guess I will, too. That Miss Gould—one of them—I don't know which—invited me to go on a motor-ing party her aunt is getting up. They're going to Wellesley. I'd like to see the college because my sister is thinking of entering next year. I really think I ought to look the place over."

"Well," Ernest remarked, "that leaves you and me, Al, to do this Bunker Hill job all by our lonesomeness."

"You see, Mart," Al began in a hesitating manner, "the other Gould twin—I don't know which one either—but the one that didn't ask Art—asked me to go to Wellesley, too. And I thought as long as Art was going——"

"All right," said Ernest, smothering disappointment. "Oh, I know what I'll do. I'll take to-day to plug at that essay. Then to-morrow we'll go over to Bunker Hill."

In spite of the work piled up before him, Ernest found it a lonely day. The house was absolutely silent. Even Mrs. Martin went into town for a day's shopping. Delaying as long as possible the awful initial moment of work, Ernest collected all kinds of accessories, necessary and unnecessary. He sharpened his pencils to slender, rapier-like points. He hunted fifteen minutes until he found a special brand with a rubber on the end. Found—he spent another minute absently gnawing the rubber off. Having exhausted all the possible subterfuges, he settled down and worked hard for an hour.

Then suddenly, a sound from downstairs, a sound in all that solitude and silence, as brazen as a bell, brought him out of his absorption.

It was only that a door opened. But following its abrupt slam came the swish of a feminine skirt. This new sound rustled the length of the hall, subsided. A window opened. Followed absolute silence. Ernest walked softly to his window and looked out at the Maywood hills.

Spring had not come. It was one of those rare days, earnest of a golden summer, by which the New England climate annually fools the oldest inhabitant into believing that winter has gone. Skies washed clear and blue, feathery clouds lighted from within, grass shooting through steamy loam to jostle crocuses, May flowers, and violets.

The window shut. The skirt took up its rustle and swished down the hall. The door closed. Syl-

via Gordon's personality, which had scented the whole house for an instant, faded into silence and nothingness. But the whiff of spring that she had let in through the open window persisted.

Ernest still stood at the window. Dreaming, he still gazed at the Maywood hills. Suddenly his thought caught sight, in the far-off twilit reaches of his mind, of—how exquisitely evasive it was, that being of mist, how delicately evanescent! Lightly but with intense speed, his thought galloped after—galloped—galloped—always pursuing but never quite catching up.

“How about Bunker Hill to-day?” Ernest said the next morning.

“I tell you what, Mart,” Sandy said eagerly, “I wish you'd put that off till to-morrow. Your sister said she'd never seen the old North Church—you know the one. The first boy-scout, Paul Revere:

“One if by land and two if by sea, rubbering on the opposite shore I'll be

Swiftly to beat it and spread the alarm to every Middlesex hayseed's farm.

That one. She said she'd show me all the high-brow historic places at the North End—Independence Bell——”

“That's in Philadelphia,” Ernest remarked, not in the pride of omniscience but as one who states a fact.



"Is it?" said Sandy indignantly. "What a nerve to sacrilegiously move a fine old landmark like that. There ain't no real reverence for nothing no longer in this country. Is it not so? And then we'll see the House of Seven Gables."

"Salem," Ernest corrected politely.

"Well, anyway, the Old Manse."

"Concord," Ernest stated wearily. "Don't look for the Flatiron Building or the Metropolitan Tower, will you, little one? At last accounts, they had not been moved from New York."

"That little Tate girl is coming on fine," Cinders said with enthusiasm. "Say, she *can* play tennis, can't she? I said I'd stroll over this morning."

"Those Gould girls and their brother offered to take Al and me through Harvard to-day," Art began.

"And I really ought to go," Al ended it for him. "You see, my mother's brothers all went to Harvard, and she'll be awfully disappointed if I don't see it."

"Kindly cut out fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles for excuses," Ernest begged bitterly. "Who was the Indian who said he'd never dare look his father in the face if he didn't go over to Bunker Hill?"

"I did," Cinders threw in jauntily. "Well, I guess I'll be perambulating."

"I'll finish that damn essay to-day," Ernest said. "But to-morrow——" he ended threateningly.

He ground lonesomely away all day long. But

he did not finish the essay. At intervals the door downstairs would open. The rustle of a skirt would fill the house with its subtle, exquisitely minute, gigantically reverberant thunders. Always at these times, Ernest would stop and dream. Dream—dream—and about nothing—dream until his dream broke in a vague irritation and impatience.

“Now to-day,” he began in a menacing tone, after breakfast the next morning, “we’ll——”

He was interrupted. Advancing with military quickstep to a position directly in front of him, Al and Art saluted. They chanted in unison with wooden monotonous voices: “The Gould twins have invited us to go with them and their brother to Lexington and Concord. We are much interested in the memorials to American patriotism, but, more than anything else, we are determined to get those pulchritudinous young females unmixed.”

They saluted again.

Ernest laughed in spite of himself.

“Your sister said she’d take me to Salem to-day—she knows a lot of people there.” Sandy’s air was meek. He had the appearance of slipping this in while yet the softness of his mirth lay on Ernest. “And I like to zealously improve my mind.”

“I’m still on the job teaching the young idea how to cut,” remarked Cinders.

“All right,” said Ernest. “I hereby wash my hands of you. And to the deepest, darkest Plutonian depths with you. I am glad, though,” he added, with an effect of heavy sarcasm, “that you

insisted on a non-fussing expedition. It has made it so easy to entertain you."

This shaft pierced no heart. The quartette was too busy re-combing hair, re-arranging ties, furtively studying the set, over proudly-held broad shoulders, of best coats.

Alone once more, Ernest worked lamely and lonesomely for a while. "I'm not getting anywhere," he said finally to himself, "I guess I'll go into the Boston Public Library and clean up that research business. That will leave the rest of the week clear."

With Ernest, thinking was slow, acting quick. Leaping into his coat, he tore to the Maywood station. Falling into the only vacant seat in the ten-fifteen train, he found Sylvia Gordon there.

"Greetings, fellow-prisoner!" Ernest said. "How goes the thesis?"

"Very badly, thank you, companion-in-misery," Sylvia replied. "How about the essay?"

"Pretty rotten, thank you," Ernest returned cheerfully.

"I'm going into the Boston Library to grind," Sylvia confided.

"Are you?" said Ernest. "That's a coincidence. So am I."

"What is the subject of your essay, Ernest?" Sylvia asked.

"'The Character of Wilhelm Meister.' I've worked until I'm almost dippy."

"Talking about coincidences!" Sylvia said.

"Mine is Goethe's 'Faust.' You know I simply *adore* Goethe."

"Another coincidence," Ernest admitted. "He certainly is the main squeeze in the whole literary works for me."

It was like that all the way into Boston—Ernest told Sylvia all those thoughts about Wilhelm Meister that he had not confided to his group.

"I'm glad you're going to the Library," he concluded, "you know the ropes: I don't."

Sylvia did know the ropes. She led him with an accustomed air to one of the big tables in the beautiful, arched, gray-stone reading-room. She exorcised by her private magic a pair of book-genii who fetched and carried until she and Ernest sat shoulder-high behind Goethe. Then she fell to her reading and her note-taking. From that instant, she hardly looked up.

Ernest also worked hard, but not so hard as Sylvia. His glance, straying up from his book, occasionally hit the head opposite, caught, lingered there.

How quiet she was! How concentrated!

She had taken off her hat and jacket. She sat in an attitude deliciously feminine, her head bent, her shoulders drooped forward. Ernest recalled the little marble bust of Clytie of which Phoebe was so fond.

She sat in gloom at first; her brown hair took on its brown. It fell here into tiny eddies of shadow, there into tiny maelstroms of light. Suddenly a

long-fingered sunbeam fell upon her; the shadow melted, vanished. Her hair brightened, became light itself, floating off into tendrils, the finest and silkiest, dissolving at the ends, evaporating, merging with the very air.

Her skin was satin—and white. Was it the white of marble, of ivory, of alabaster? On the soft contour of her cheek lay a bloom as delicate as if the faintest flame of spirit-fire had burned through. On this bloom lay eyelashes, satiny also, the color of the deepest shadow in her hair—lay eyelashes and their fairy-film, fluttering shadows. Her mouth, like a little rose, tightly folded, seemed red above the white point of her chin. Or did the chin seem white under that petal-pink, double ripple of lips? At any rate, white chin merged marvelously with whiter neck.

How little she was, how slender and frail and yet how softly round.

How still she was! How remote!

How—— She was something else. But what was it?

Pure! That was it. That was what she was. *Pure!*

After all, that was what girls were. They were pure. For the first time the word *purity* gained an abstract significance in Ernest's mind. You never thought of that word in connection with men. But purity in women was beautiful.

Sylvia was wonderfully pure. She was purity itself.

Something in Ernest broke, some crust that lay between him and a knowledge of himself, a crust that, subconsciously, he had tried not to break. A flood of conviction burst upon him—tossed him—spun him—floated him—subsided—— Suddenly he knew that he worshiped purity in Sylvia; that he worshiped it in Woman; that he must worship it wherever he found it the rest of his life. Many thoughts darted out from this conviction and whirled through his mind, detached, unrelated, irrelevant. Perhaps he did not himself realize that he was thinking them. After all, girls could no longer be ignored. They were in the world. There, they were with a continuous blare of trumpets—to stay. Life was incomplete without them! They were the other half of creation. You could not beat their game. A man was handicapped from the start. Whoever planned the universe had loaded their dice. But perhaps there were compensations. They were beautiful. They were good. It could not be denied that in many ways they were original and inspiring. They were wonderful in their sympathy and understanding. There were some thoughts—precious ones, too—that they alone could understand. Why—a man lived two lives really; and one of those lives must be shared with a woman.

Ernest's soul emitted a long sigh. It was a silent sigh. Nobody heard it. Ernest did not hear it himself. Had the whole world at that moment been raised to disembodied spirits, not a female soul contemplating the revolution in Ernest, but would have

laughed in triumph, not a male soul but would have wept with regret.

For Ernest had laid down his arms to women.

Sylvia showed him a place where they could lunch. Afterwards they worked again. Mid-afternoon, Ernest pushed a note across the table.

My head is getting woozy. How would you like to go canoeing? We can cut across by trolley from Riverside to Maywood and get home in time for dinner.

She returned the note with a scribbled, "I would love it."

I repeat, spring had not yet come. But she stood tiptoe at the door, her lap full of flowers, waiting to burst in with dance and with song.

The trees made a soft chocolate-colored smoke against a sky that dazzled with its blue. The sun dropped red ripples on a river that soothed with its gray. The grass had newly painted itself green.

Under the blue sky, Ernest discovered Sylvia's eyes. They were blue, too—china-blue—seemingly much deeper in color because curling lashes, always at half-mast, helped with their shadow.

"Now tell me," Ernest said, "about your thesis and how you came to like Goethe and how you happened to choose 'Faust' instead of 'Wilhelm Meister.'"

She told him.

Nobody who has not been through the same experience will understand what happened. He will not believe the wonders of coincidence in their

thoughts, beliefs, opinions, tastes, theories, points of view, that those two found, the miracles of coincidence in the mere matter of experience. He will not credit the number of vistas that Sylvia opened to Ernest, the number of doors that Ernest threw wide for Sylvia. For before their very eyes, worlds were bursting, re-forming, bursting again to spawn bigger worlds. Yea, æons were passing; universes were in the making. And, indeed, this outsider—perhaps he is a myth after all—might have missed most of the magic of it had he listened, unillumined by the memory of his own experience. For this is the sort of thing he would have heard.

“Sylvia, do you like Keats?”

“I adore him, Ernest. He’s my favorite English poet.”

“What an extraordinary coincidence! Which of his poems do you like best, Sylvia?”

“‘Bards of passion, bards of mirth,’ Ernest.”

“What a coincidence, Sylvia. That’s the only poem I’ve ever liked enough to learn by heart.”

They recited it together and laughed when Ernest broke down on line six.

“What wonderful single lines Keats gives you, Ernest,” Sylvia added. “‘Forlorn, the very sound is like a bell!’ and ‘Beaded bubbles winking at the brim.’”

“I have them both in my notebook,” Ernest said in the tone of one who does not expect to be believed.

“Have you read his letters, Ernest?”

“I eat them up, Sylvia.”



That night the quintette, in the best of spirits, smoked and talked for an hour before going to bed.

"Well, Mart," Cinders announced cheerfully at last, "I've had enough fussing. How about cutting it all out and leading a man's life for a while? What do you say, if this weather keeps up, to some tennis to-morrow morning? It puts your game on the blink to play with a woman."

"All right for me and Al," said Art. "Those Gould girls are going away for a couple of days to-morrow and we still can't tell one from the other."

"Yes," Sandy chimed in. "Your sister says she's neglected Miss Gordon so long that she feels she must devote herself to her for the rest of her stay. I tell you what—tennis in the morning—golf in the afternoon—dinner in town, and Daisy Deene in 'The Silly Suffragette' afterwards. How about it?"

"Nothing doing," said Ernest trenchantly. "Not for mine! You fellows can play golf and tennis till the cows come home. But I've offered to take Phoebe and Sylvia Gordon motoring for the next two days. This is Sylvia's spring recess and she hasn't seen outdoors yet. Come along, those who don't want to play tennis."

After the inevitable ante-retiring fracas in which flying pillows, wet face-cloths, soppy sponges, soapy towels played their inevitable part, the Princetonians settled down from libelous argument to mere casual abuse, to occasional sleepy sarcasm, to deep breathing, to complete unconsciousness.

Ernest remained wakeful far into the night. And, very late, a wonderful thing happened. His thought suddenly caught sight of its mystic occupant far off in the illimitable reaches of his mind. It galloped lightly but swiftly after—galloped—galloped—galloped until for the first time it caught up.

And, lo, the hair was no longer the hair of Fay Faxon; it was blonde, ethereal, melting into the very air. The eyes were no longer the twin star-blackness of the young girl actor; they were china-blue, shadowed by eyelashes always at half-mast. The mouth was no longer curved into the tragic contours of the Italian poet; it was like a little pink bud, tightly folded. Yet, though the face was the face of Sylvia Gordon, it had retained some subtle suggestions of all the others. Or was it that Sylvia was a divine, spiritual composite of all the beauty in the world?

He waited a long time, until everybody slept. Then he arose, stole out of the Gym and downstairs to his own room. He unlocked his desk and took out Notebook Number 5. He looked with a frown at the title—WOMEN, THEIR FAULTS AND FRAILTIES. He glanced with a sneer at its solitary entry. Then he placed it with its predecessors, locked it up. From a pigeonhole he took a fresh blank-book. He numbered it six. He labeled it WOMAN—HER BEAUTIES AND VIRTUES. And on the first page he inscribed:

“The woman-soul leadeth us upward and on.”

## CHAPTER V

### PHOEBE CLOSES WITH CUPID

“**P**EOPLE are so lovely to engaged couples nowadays. They never did such things when we were young. And the men enjoy the entertaining just as much as the girls.” Mrs. Martin was speaking to Cousin Debbie. She paused as her daughter entered the room and her preoccupied gaze swept over Phoebe’s lithe figure. “Why, don’t you remember, Edward, how——” She started briskly turning to her husband. Then as if something, which she had subconsciously noted in Phoebe’s appearance, had just reached her intelligence, Mrs. Martin stopped short. But all she said was, “Aren’t you back early? Tired? Or was it a puncture?”

“No, I’m not tired and it wasn’t a puncture. I came back because I wanted——” Phoebe’s voice slid off into silence. She stared at her father and mother as if she were looking at them for the first time. Or perhaps it was from another point of view.

Obviously a little surprised by her manner, Mrs. Martin stared back. Phoebe had just returned from a long motor-ride with Tug through an autumnal fog. She had brought the night in with her. The

dampness made her tendrilly hair a mass of floating ringlets; it added a fresh burnish to her brows and lashes. Indeed, there was luster to her whole appearance. For, notwithstanding the wet, cheeks and eyes flashed with the whitest fires of her spirit.

"Because you wanted——" Mrs. Martin prompted.

But instead of answering, Phoebe said, "What were you and father talking about when I came in?" Her voice had a suspicious note.

"About Tom Deane's and Sally Gould's engagement and the lovely things people have been doing for them. I think it's so nice that Tom's attended all the teas with Sally. I was just saying that they didn't do such things for engaged couples when Debbie and I were girls."

Deborah Dodd was Mrs. Martin's cousin and about her own age. A little, thin, brown, bright-eyed bird of a creature, Mrs. Martin had always been the meteor of her quiet spinster existence. Now, however, that Phoebe had grown up to an acknowledged belledom, she had transferred her admiration to that engaging young person. Whenever Phoebe was present, Cousin Debbie's head always turned in her direction—her eyes followed her wherever she moved.

"What did they do?" The suspicious note had gone out of Phoebe's tone. Her manner was a little blank.

"Why—nothing."

"I think that was horrid." Phoebe's blankness

flared to indignation. "Sally Gould says half the fun of being engaged is the way people entertain you."

"Well, I guess it was because folks were poorer then," Cousin Debbie explained, cocking her head wisely. "It was just about all they could do to give a girl a good wedding. And they thought more about their wedding outfit when I was young. They had to have so many clothes then—enough for a year. Now they only get enough for one season."

"Some people think," Mrs. Martin added, "that they make too much of a to-do about engagements nowadays. But I don't—I think it's beautiful. I should just have loved it—wouldn't you, Edward?"

"No," Mr. Martin announced in disgust. "Men hate a fuss—the wedding itself's bad enough. Why, Bertha, do you suppose I'd have gone to any tea-fights even if I'd had the time? Or let you go? Engaged couples want to be let alone."

"That's perfect nonsense, father," commented Phoebe. "It all depends on the way you've been brought up. Nowadays men go to teas just as much as women. Look at Tom Deane."

"I suppose the willy-boys do," Mr. Martin agreed. "Tom Deane's a sissy from Sissyville. But I guess you don't find many husky ones there."

Phoebe chose to ignore this. "I should have thought, mother, you would have found it *pretty pokey* being engaged if nobody did things for you."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Martin said in a shocked tone, "I was so busy sewing and furnishing our house

up that it didn't seem as if the days were half long enough. Don't you remember how I slaved, Debbie? "

Debbie confirmed this with an assenting cluck and many pecking nods of her head. " Bertha, your mother had more fun out of it than you did—you *might* say. Don't you remember how she used to have all the old ladies in to tea about three times a week to show them your things? "

Mr. Martin chuckled. " And how mad she used to get with me because when I was in town I'd take Bertha out right under their eyes for a walk! The scoldings she's given me for that! She wanted to show Bertha off, of course."

Phoebe started to speak again. Then as if the thing she tried to say refused to roll from her tongue, she obviously made off in another direction. " How did you announce your engagement, mother? "

" Why, I just told my friends who lived near and wrote to those that I couldn't see. Then your father and I called on a few and that was all there was to it."

A long pause followed. Once or twice, Phoebe made an attempt to break it. But every time, just as the words came, she bit her lips. " What were you married in, mother? " she asked finally.

" Ask your father," Mrs. Martin suggested slyly.

Mr. Martin did not look up.

" Going-away costume of brown ottoman silk, long brown cloak of ottoman silk, brown velvet

bonnet with brown tips on it," he recited this off with the facility of a phonograph.

"Good for you, Edward," Mrs. Martin applauded. "Well, I declare!" A soft, pleased light fired her eye and a delicate surge of color pinkened her cheek. "Phoebe, I taught your father to say that. So many of his folks who couldn't come to the wedding asked him what I was going to wear that I made him learn it by heart. And he's remembered it all these years." Over her work, Mrs. Martin's eyes, shining with appreciation, met her husband's.

"And what kind of a wedding did you have?" Phoebe asked, unheeding this by-play.

"Very quiet. Just the nearest relatives on both sides. I don't believe there were more than twenty there. It was in the fall and I decorated the house with asters and dahlias from our garden. I remember mother was heartbroken because we couldn't hire a florist and caterer. You see, mother didn't have a wedding, and so she was just dying for me to have one. But we couldn't afford it. Why, at mother's wedding—that was over sixty years ago—they had no collation; they handed round lemonade and cake for refreshments."

"*Mercy!*" exclaimed Phoebe. "Refreshments! Collation! How primitive!" Had she been confronted with the Jurassic bird, her tone could not have contained more of astonishment.

"I sometimes wonder what mother'd think," Mrs. Martin sailed on, serenely oblivious of the younger

generation, "if she could see the fashionable weddings nowadays, when often the only decorations are field-flowers—'weeds,' she'd call them. Etta Ray made an arbor of autumn leaves for my wedding—in one corner of the parlor between the secretary and the big clock. I thought it was lovely, but mother wanted me to stand under a wedding-bell of cut flowers."

"The brown of her dress was something *handsome* against those red and yellow leaves," Cousin Debbie interpolated.

"And where did you go on your wedding-trip?" Phoebe continued.

"Niagara Falls," Mrs. Martin said proudly.

"Niagara Falls!" Phoebe repeated in a scandalized tone. "*Mother!* Father Martin, you didn't go to that jay place?"

"You must remember, Phoebe," Mr. Martin answered, employing the quiet voice which he so rarely used with his daughter, "that your mother and I hadn't the advantage of your advice then. There was nobody to enlighten us and so we were vulgar enough to enjoy what is, after all, the most wonderful sight in America."

"Father," Phoebe threatened, "if you get sarcastic with me, I shall come over there and hug you so hard that I'll probably break your glasses."

Mr. Martin did not reply. He reached for his book.

"But just the same," Phoebe went on, "it's an awful shock to have Niagara Falls flashed on me at



this late day. After the way I've trusted you, too. You should have kept it a *dead secret*."

Mr. Martin maintained an elaborate silence. His eye ran up and down the page, discovered his place.

"Why, father," Phoebe continued the attack, "if that awful event in our family history were to leak out, many doors now open to me in this town would be closed forever. I expect they wouldn't give Ern his degree at Princeton."

Mr. Martin paused with a careful unconsciousness to examine an illustration.

"I feel," Phoebe concluded, "as if I'd suddenly discovered that you'd *done time*. I don't know whether there's any law that permits a girl to repudiate parents who made such a fierce social break before she was born. But if there isn't, there ought to be. However I'll overlook it this time, Mr. Martin, if you'll give me your sacred word of honor as a gentleman that you'll never go to Niagara Falls on a honeymoon again."

Mr. Martin laughed and put his book down.

Mrs. Martin, impassively watching this conquest, made one of her automatic, subconscious observations. "Phoebe's changed in one thing," she thought. "She used to be amusing without knowing it. Now she realizes—she's being funny on purpose." It is unlikely, however, with all her astuteness that Mrs. Martin appreciated the importance of the birth in her daughter's psychology of a conscious sense of humor.

"How long were you gone?" Phoebe asked.



“Thank you, Mrs. Martin,” she said, “you’ve saved my life. Mother and father, I am engaged to Tug Warburton.”



"Three days," Mrs. Martin took it up again.

"Seems to me that was kind of a *stingy* honeymoon."

"We were glad to get *any*," Mrs. Martin bristled.

"Did you have many wedding-presents?"

"No-o-o. Not so many compared with nowadays." Mrs. Martin admitted this with a palpable reluctance. "But what we had were lovely," she added loyally.

"They were the handsomest wedding-presents they had in North Campion that year," said Cousin Debbie with an indignant flutter.

Another long pause followed. Phoebe now bore the air of one definitely nonplussed. "Mother," she burst out desperately at last, "how did you tell your mother that you were engaged to father?"

"Well," Mrs. Martin admitted, "that was the hardest part of the whole thing. I held in three days because I didn't know how to put it. And, finally, the third night, I walked right up to them and, before I could stop to think, I said, 'Mother and father, I am engaged to Ed Martin!' and that was all there was to it."

Phoebe leaped to her feet. "Thank you, Mrs. Martin," she said, "you've saved my life. Mother and father, I am engaged to Tug Warburton."

And with an embarrassed little giggle that was half-sob, Phoebe flew over to the rocking-chair, dropped into Mrs. Martin's lap, and buried her head on her mother's shoulder.

"Well," Mrs. Martin said when they were alone, "how do you feel about it, father? Were you surprised?"

"Oh, I guess nothing surprises me as far as you-women are concerned," Mr. Martin answered. "Then I'm so glad to think she's all over that Hazeltine affair that—— And I suppose I'd rather it would be Tug if it's got to be——"

"If it's got to be anybody," Mrs. Martin finished for him. "Men are so queer—so different from women. I'm just tickled to death."

Mr. Martin looked at her silently, but many expressions conflicted in his face. "Bertha, I must say I can't understand your feeling so pleased about it. Do you mean to tell me that you *want* to lose Phoebe?"

"Why, father, it's not losing her. Still, I guess most mothers do feel sort of relieved when a girl's safely settled. I'd look at it very differently if it was Ernie. I don't want that Ernie should get married before he's twenty-seven and I should prefer him to wait until he's thirty."

"Now that's where I disagree with you," Mr. Martin said argumentatively. "I'd rather Ernest would marry just as soon as he gets out of college. There's nothing like the responsibility of a family to sober a young man and keep his nose to the grindstone. But a girl—that's quite a different matter. What's Phoebe want to marry for? Hasn't she got a good home and everything she could possibly need?" Mr. Martin's voice arose

almost to falsetto heights as he asked the question immemorial with fathers.

Mrs. Martin, as was her wont, worked back to its answer through a series of side issues. "Well, it would simply break my heart if Ernie got married so young. I don't want to see him go through what you went through the first five years of our marriage. Why, Edward, your hair began to turn gray before you were twenty-five. Phoebe says that Mr. Warburton says that Tug can travel about this district until after Thanksgiving—that's three weeks. Then he's got to spend six months in the West. If he gets orders above a certain amount, Mr. Warburton will give him a handsome raise in salary." Mrs. Martin stopped an instant to study her husband's face. "You see, father, a girl likes to have a home of her own. She can do just as she pleases in it and she feels so much more important." Again Mrs. Martin stopped, and this time she had a helpless expression. "Now, Ed, don't say I haven't warned you. I've told you for years that you must expect that Phoebe would marry young. It's come now and you must take your medicine—that's all."

"Well, I'm not kicking, am I?" Mr. Martin asked in a tone that surged and swelled and beat with irritation.

Mrs. Martin let that discussion evaporate. "I guess we'd better give her a chest of silver for a wedding-gift," she said after a long pause.

There is no onomatopoeia for the sound, half-

groan of impatience, half-snort of anger that Mr. Martin emitted. "Wedding-presents! Good Lord! What's the use of talking about wedding-presents? She isn't going to be married to-morrow, is she?"

"No," Mrs. Martin replied tranquilly, "but I shouldn't be surprised if they were married in June. Tug isn't the kind that'll wait long. And I made up my mind years ago that when Phoebe was married that would be what we'd give her."

"Do you mean to tell me that you've been planning her wedding-present all these years?" Mr. Martin ejaculated. "Well, you-women——"

"Edward Martin," his wife announced with a sudden flash of spirit, "if you say 'you-women' again I'll go down to-morrow and join the women-suffragists." But immediately her tone dropped to its most soothing level. "Now, father, don't get blue about this. Everything considered, it's the best thing that could happen to Phoebe. Tug's a fine, straightforward, decent boy with no bad habits, and he's perfectly crazy about her. They'll live right here in Maywood where you'll see her every day. His prospects are splendid. His father and mother'll worship the ground Phoebe walks on. And if she has any children——" Mrs. Martin did not pursue that train of thought. "I think we'd better give her a cedar chest for an engagement gift."

"What—do I get stung for an engagement gift, too?" Mr. Martin demanded.

"Of course. I'll go into Boston with Phoebe

to-morrow and order a nice big one. I'll buy some linen, too. Phoebe'll think that she'll want to do every stitch herself. But if anything's to be finished before the wedding, I see where Debbie and I go right straight to work. Besides the sooner I get things started the better; for this house will be full of excitement in a week. Phoebe and Tug'll have the loveliest time from now until he goes West. Everybody in this town will entertain them. They're both popular, and then everybody likes Mrs. Warburton so."

"Well," Mr. Martin remarked cynically, "I have my opinion of the kind of young men they have nowadays. Why, I'd as soon get married in a lion's cage as go to a lot of pink teas."

"You must remember, father," Mrs. Martin explained, and perhaps it was natural that her effort to defend her daughter's contemporaries should bring a slight shade of patronage into her voice, "that Tug has been brought up very different from the way we were. He's been accustomed to the most elegant forms of entertaining. His mother's had an 'at home' day all her life, and she told me once that, from the moment Tug could speak, she had him in the room whenever she had company so's he'd get accustomed to talking with women. Have you ever noticed how easy Tug is with everybody? He never had any awkward age like Ernie. He'll enjoy all the things that are done for them just as much as Phoebe. And people are so lovely to engaged couples nowadays."



Mr. Martin did not answer. But perhaps in the course of their whole married life his silence had never been more eloquent.

Mrs. Martin ignored this silence. It is likely, indeed, that she did not notice it. She was engaged in what was a rare form of exercise for her—walking excitedly up and down the room.

“Do you know, father,” she said suddenly, turning to him a face that alternately paled and sparkled with the excitement of a great resolution, “the moment the engagement’s announced, I’m going to give a tea for Phoebe and Tug myself.”

Mr. Martin threw up his hands.

Everything turned out as Mrs. Martin prophesied. Late the next afternoon arrived the glossy, reddish, rectangular box which was the cedar chest. It was perhaps indicative of Mr. Martin’s state of mind that he never looked at it without thinking of a coffin. That evening Tug’s father and mother called; Mrs. Warburton gurgling and inarticulate with delight, Mr. Warburton embarrassed and jocular. The day after this event, Phoebe deposited in the post office a flock of tiny envelopes which announced to an astonished world the most important event of her life; also they invited it to celebrate the betrothal at a tea. Before a week had passed, most of these envelopes returned in the form either of a gift or of an invitation to dissipation. The postman appeared three times a day loaded with mail; the expressman was ever at the door.

Arrived first for Phoebe from the far-away Ernest a framed picture of the Princeton campus and for Tug from the same source, a telegram, "Thank Heaven, Phoebe's picked out somebody I can borrow money from." Close on the Warburton call followed a tea-service of Sheffield plate, over which in a rapture of admiration, Mrs. Martin actually brooded. From the rank and file of relatives and friends came flowers, cups, spoons, plates, pictures, vases, books—the advertisements of any department-store will show them all neatly catalogued. Mrs. Martin was more affected by this excitement than any other member of the household. When the bell rang, she dropped whatever she was doing to run, scissors in hand, to the door. In pity, Phoebe left orders with her mother to open any parcel that came during her absence.

Mr. Martin alone walked through this alien absorption a silent and apparently indifferent man. He went to his office as early as possible in the morning and came home as late. The two evenings of the week that Tug managed to make Maywood he spent away from his home. Indeed, after his first talk with his future son-in-law—palpably on Mr. Martin's part of a forced cordiality—he avoided all communication with him. Whatever the conversation Mr. Martin opened with his wife, it invariably turned to furniture, china, silver, linen. Whatever the conversation he opened with Phoebe, it invariably switched to the cost of living. Try as he might, it would have been impossible for Mr.

Martin to ignore the signs of the approaching domestic secession. Mrs. Martin, Cousin Debbie, and Phoebe never sat down nowadays without a napkin or a towel in their hands. If Mr. Martin lifted his eyes from his book, they always fell somewhere on a P. M. beautifully embroidered. If Phoebe was not present when callers came, Mrs. Martin did the honors of the cedar chest. Fragments of her dissertation were always floating between Mr. Martin and his reading.

"Yes, Phoebe says she's going to have both hers and Tug's monogram on all her tablecloths, close to the center, Tug's opposite where she sits and hers opposite his place—yes, she's going to have white and gold soup-plates with her monogram in gold on them—yes, Phoebe's idea is to have a different kind of china for every course, the soup in white and gold, the meat in Canton medallion, the salad in some Italian ware, and the dessert in Minton—yes, that's what I tell her—it does sound pretty expensive—no, Phoebe hasn't made up her mind what kind of furniture yet—yes, those little ones are guest-towels."

In brief, Mr. Martin was like a man caught on the top floor of a burning building. Did he seek escape by the elevator, flames beat up at him in sheets. Did he turn to the stairs, smoke volleyed over him in clouds.

"Whatever is the matter with Ed?" Cousin Debbie said again and again. "I never saw him so kinder stand-offish in my life."

"Oh, he's *jealous*," Mrs. Martin said in a tone in which impatience struggled with pity. "He can't bear to think there's anybody in Phoebe's life more important to her than he is. The poor child understands it all and she's trying as hard as she can to share everything with him. But just as sure as she starts to discuss anything she's interested in, Edward shuts right up. The only thing to do is to leave him alone. He'll come round all right. All fathers are like that, I guess."

For even Mrs. Martin did not realize how deep the dagger had gone.

But days and days went by and Mr. Martin did not come round.

The afternoon of her tea Mrs. Martin telephoned in to Boston and begged him to come home early enough to get the tail end of it. Dinner was long past, however, before he put in an appearance. But Mrs. Martin choked back her reproaches, brought his food into the dining-room herself. She sat with him while he ate. Mr. Martin could see his own face reflected in the sideboard mirror just back of her. He looked white and exhausted. But Mrs. Martin——

Mrs. Martin, although Mr. Martin did not realize it, had always looked ten years older than he. That night she looked ten years younger. Her smart new gown of gray chiffon and old Cluny had done its best for her tall spare figure. Her coiffure had not departed by the insurrection of a single lock from the marceled mold into which the hairdresser

had turned it. The radiance of the afternoon's excitement still hung over her.

"How'd it go?" Mr. Martin asked casually when he had finished eating.

"Oh, beautifully, Edward! It was a great success. Almost everybody came—at least I can't think of but two or three who didn't, though I haven't had a chance yet to look through the cards and compare them with Phoebe's list. It is perfectly remarkable how popular Phoebe is. Well, I was proud of the child—she was just as sweet and cordial to the last person who came as the first. Several people brought her presents. You remember 'The Molly Coddles'—that Sewing Club Phoebe belonged to. Well, they're going to give her a luncheon set of Swedish weaving—each girl to do a piece. And old Mrs. Sawyer sent her three of the prettiest little aprons you ever saw in your life—Phoebe's just crazy about them. It seems—I'd forgotten all about it—that when Phoebe came home from Europe she brought Mrs. Sawyer a Roman scarf because she'd heard her say she'd always wanted one. Mrs. Sawyer said she never would forget that. And, Edward, she put every stitch in them herself—that old lady! Why, she must be eighty-two. And Mr. Wilde brought her a framed picture of a colored fashion-plate from Godey's 'Lady's Book.' Phoebe's just wild about it."

"Did Tug come?"

"Oh, yes, of course! I got the idea that Tug had had some sort of disagreement with his mother

before he came over here. Not that anything was *said*—I just felt it sort of in the air. I must say I *do* think Mrs. Warburton's a little too indulgent with Tug. I wouldn't like to think I'd been so easy with Ernie."

"Well, calm yourself on that score, Bertha," Mr. Martin said saturninely. "You certainly have been a Spartan mother, especially as far as Ernest's concerned. What's the next excitement?" he asked after a while.

"Oh, something perfectly lovely," Mrs. Martin said in the tone of one who enumerates her Christmas gifts. "You see, Tug doesn't get home again until next Wednesday. And that day Mrs. Marsh is giving a dinner for a dozen young people at the Touraine and a theater-party at the Hollis Street afterwards. She invited Mrs. Warburton and me to go, too. She says she won't have a good time at all, alone with those young people. Mrs. Warburton and I didn't have to be asked twice, I tell *you*. Mrs. Warburton says she's glad she hasn't more than one son to get married because ever since the engagement was announced, her house has run itself. She says she's so excited she doesn't know whether she's on her head or her heels—and I feel exactly the same way. She said that yesterday she made up her mind that she would stay home from the Tate tea and rest up. But at four o'clock, there she was pelting down there."

"Where's Phoebe?"

"Oh, she's upstairs, lying down. She's all tuck-

ered out. I'm not the least bit tired—I could go right through it again. I'm trying to get calmed down enough to take this dress off. You'll have to help me, Edward, there are more than a million hooks. Oh, yes! Edward, Mrs. Marsh says she wants you to go to the theater-party and she says she simply will not take *no* for an answer. She says there'll be an end-seat kept for you and, if you don't come, it will remain vacant all the evening."

"You'll have to tell Mrs. Marsh," Mr. Martin said decidedly, "that I shan't be there. I'm too busy."

"Well," Mrs. Martin said, "isn't it lovely of her to bother so? If they'd only entertained engaged couples when we were young, how we would have enjoyed it!"

Instead of answering, "How long does Tug stay next week?" Mr. Martin inquired obliquely.

"He gets in Wednesday afternoon late and goes off early the next morning."

When Mr. Martin spoke again, it was evident that he was making an effort to keep his scorn out of his voice. But now he answered his wife's question. "No, all this entertaining would have been wasted on me. Do you suppose I'd put in a whole afternoon and evening at a party when I hadn't seen you for so long? I was too crazy about my girl. If there's anything I despise, it's a man who goes to teas."

And again, under the impression that she was pouring oil on a troubled sea, Mrs. Martin said

sweetly: "But, Edward, you must remember Tug was brought up very different from us."

"Oh, Edward," Mrs. Martin said late Wednesday night, "I looked for you all the evening. I did hope you'd get there for the last act."

"I'm sorry, Bertha," Mr. Martin answered listlessly, "but I had a meeting and couldn't get away. Did you have a good time?"

"Lovely, perfectly lovely! It was such a pretty dinner. We had a big round table in the middle of the dining-room at the Touraine and it was beautifully decorated with flowers. All those young girls looked like flowers themselves in their pretty dresses. There was Phoebe, Fannie Marsh, Molly Tate, the Gould twins, Sylvia, Tug, Fred Partland, the Warren boys, Tom Deane, and Billy Thurston. Of course Tug and Phoebe hadn't seen each other for a week and they simply were full of things to tell each other. And pretty soon everybody got to joking them and finally somebody said, 'Oh, let's cut the engaged pair out—they're dead to the world—and pretend the dinner's given for Mrs. Martin.' And, Edward, everybody paid so much attention to me that I was quite embarrassed. Then afterwards, we three mothers sat together in the theater and we had so much fun—I really think we enjoyed it more than the young people."

"Phoebe go right up to bed?" Mr. Martin asked.

"Yes, poor child; she's all worn out. She says she's glad she hasn't got to be engaged but once."



"Well, what's on the docket now?"

"Tug's going to be home Tuesday until Saturday of next week. Somebody's got something planned for every moment," said Mrs. Martin, "and Tuesday night Mrs. Warburton's going to give a dinner-dance. You see, it's a sort of farewell, for Tug leaves Saturday for his six months' trip in the West. The dinner-dance is going to be an awfully big affair—Mrs. Warburton has so many friends in Brookline and Cambridge and Arlington. She's going to turn the whole lower floor of her house into a dining-room with little tables that will just seat four. Then afterwards she's going to have them all taken in barges to the Town Hall, where the dance'll be held. She's asked me to receive with her and Phoebe. Now, Edward, you've simply got to come to that. It will be an insult to Mrs. Warburton if you don't."

"Yes, I'll try to make it," Mr. Martin agreed. He struggled with himself for an instant as if trying not to say something. But he succeeded only partially, for he added, "Well, people have certainly changed."

"It isn't the folks that have changed, Edward," Mrs. Martin said for the third time, "it's the times. They do things differently from the way they did when we were young."

The day of the Warburton dance, the excitement in the Martin household was increased by Ernest's return from Princeton for Thanksgiving.

"Tell me all about it," were his first words to

Phoebe, and "Say, Tug, did you get your degree from Harvard or Vassar?" his comment when his sister complied with his request. "Teas, dinners, dances, theater-parties—whew!" Thereafter he referred to his prospective brother-in-law either as Wellesley Bill, Radcliffe Mike, or Bryn Mawr Charley.

Two o'clock that afternoon saw Mr. Martin slowly turning into his own street. He looked tired. Almost it might be said he looked lonely. The Warburton automobile was standing in front of the Martin gate, and as he passed a muffled "Hullo" from underneath the car arrested him. Mr. Martin stopped and Tug came wriggling out into the gutter. He seated himself on the curb and began to fan himself with his cap.

"Say, dad-in-law," he demanded, "can you keep a secret?"

"Easiest thing I do," Mr. Martin replied.

"Well, then, neither Phoebe nor I will be at that shindig my mother's giving to-night. I'm so tired of this pink tea business that I'd like to put a bomb under the next one. I can't tell you how I hate a tea, notwithstanding my mother is convinced that she's brought me up to love them. I nearly had a fight with her over the one your wife gave. I put my foot down and said I wouldn't go. But mother said that as Phoebe's people were giving it, I'd be a hound if I didn't put in an appearance. Well, I fell. Then Mrs. Marsh's party came along. Same row. Same line of dope. I fell again. Now my

own mother's giving a spree and I'm going to cut it. It'll be Hamlet to-night with Hamlet left out."

Mr. Martin sat down on the curb beside him. "What's Phoebe say?"

"Oh, Lord, Phoebe doesn't know anything about it. She's just as tired of all this entertaining as I am, but, being a woman, she'd feel in honor bound. It's the only flaw in perfection; so I'm not telling her."

"What's the plan?" Mr. Martin inquired.

"Rich but not gaudy! I'm abducting her! We start in a few moments, ostensibly for a little spin. Using the spellbinding arts for which I am justly famous, I shall lure her farther and farther from home until we're in the vicinity of North Shayneford. I've calculated that the machine will stop going on the lower road between Alewife Creek and the bottle-works, for I've put in only enough gasoline to last as long as that. There's no train from North Shayneford until eleven and then we've got to go into Boston first—oh, I've laid my plans with hellish subtlety—Desperate Desmond has nothing on me. And I'm going to slip it over on them. I leave the auto in care of my friend the superintendent of the bottle-works. Then we walk three miles up the road to the Shayneford Arms and have a nice tête-à-tête dinner and get acquainted with each other. If we're going to be married it's time we knew each other's real names. We'll drift into the dance about half-past twelve. I'm telling you this so they won't drag the river. To-morrow I read

the riot act to my mother. I'm leaving in three days and I intend to have my girl all to myself. After I'm gone, they can give Phoebe all the shower luncheons, tempest teas, cyclone dinners, and blizzard breakfasts they want. See!"

Mr. Martin did not speak for an instant. And, perhaps in that interval, he crossed a bridge. What came finally was, "Son-in-law, I think I'm going to like you."

"Dad-in-law," said Tug promptly, "it has always been my conviction that I, too, picked a winner."

They went into the house together. Phoebe met them at the door. "Well, Mr. Edward Martin," she exclaimed, putting her hand through her father's arm, "who's left you a million dollars? I thought you'd got a permanent, self-sustaining, and self-perpetuating grouch. But I suppose, on reflection, you've realized that this domestic tyrannicide of yours would have to bust sometime. The moment is fast approaching, sir, when you've got to forego the joy of dragging me up and down stairs by the hair of my head or keeping me confined for a month on bread and water. Why, I——"

But from the living-room came commotion that compelled scrutiny.

Mrs. Cameron, the minister's wife, was calling. She was a stout, white-haired, middle-aged woman with clear hazel eyes, dimples, and the laughter of youth. Her husband, the Reverend Dugald Cameron, was a saint, but she was, as Ernest once told

her, "a very zippy lady for a sky-pilot's bride." Perhaps her sense of a large social freedom proceeded from the possession of a large fortune. Her given name was Essaline. Whenever they were alone, Ernest treated her with the profoundest respect but, in company, he always called her "Essie." Now he was entertaining her with the contents of the cedar chest. He had listened to Mrs. Martin's performance only twice, but he already knew by heart what he called the "spiel." As the group came in from the hall, Mrs. Cameron tottered to the couch in a futile effort to calm her hysterics.

"I wouldn't laugh—so—if he'd got things—mixed," she gasped, "but he's got them right—Swedish weaving—Mexican drawn-work—baby Irish—I shall die—I *know* I shall."

"Essie," Ernest rebuked her severely, "you are the noisiest woman I ever met. You laugh like that once more and the house will be pinched."

"Don't you dare speak to me again, Ernest Martin," Mrs. Cameron ordered, sopping up her tears. "So you go away next week, Tug? What's the excitement for the remainder of your stay?"

While Tug still racked his brains, Mrs. Martin glibly recited the program.

"Bridge to-morrow afternoon at the Deanes', dance in the evening at the Goulds'. Tea Thursday at Mrs. Partland's. Dance at the High School in the evening. Tea Friday at the Marsh's—bridge in the evening with Mrs. Gould. And we're all going."

Tug winked at Mr. Martin.

"It's perfectly lovely how they entertain engaged couples nowadays," Mrs. Martin said. "They never did such things when I was young. And what I like about it is that the men enjoy it just as much as the girls."

Mr. Martin winked at Tug.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DISCOVERIES

The Waldorf.  
New York.  
Monday.

**M**Y DEAR BERTHA:

I got in this morning all right. I saw Hallowell and fixed that matter up in no time. I shall be all through with it in a day or two. They certainly do things in this town and do them quick. I could get back Thursday morning. But I think I'll seize this opportunity to run down to Princeton to see Ernest. You know I've never had much curiosity to go there because—well, I guess I never let you know what a disappointment it was to me that he didn't go to Harvard. But somehow in the last month or so I've had a sort of hankering to see college-life once more. I feel as if I'd been getting a little rusty and that would set me up. It may be spring fever but, after all, that's a conviction a man never loses—that there was a kind of gayety about his college days never to be found anywhere else, that he can go back to any time and take up. Anyway, I'd like to have one more taste before I admit that I'm middle-aged. Don't expect me back until you see me, and take care of yourself. Love to Phoebe!

Your affectionate husband,

EDWARD MARTIN.

Maywood,  
Massachusetts.  
Tuesday.

DEAR EDWARD:

I am so glad that you are going to see Ernie. Will you find out if he got the new winter flannels that I told him to buy at Christmas? I have asked him this question in every letter I've written and he hasn't answered it yet. I hope you won't come home feeling about college life the way I feel about Phoebe's engagement. Why, Edward, I almost envy her. It's such a lovely time when a girl's engaged. Sometimes I think it's the happiest period that a woman knows. If it wasn't for having your own home and a family, I declare I think most girls would be willing to be engaged all the rest of their days. It does seem strange that life should be arranged so that we have all the best part first. Stay as long as you can, Edward, for you certainly do need a rest. I shan't feel lonely with Debbie here. Phoebe sends her love.

Your loving wife,  
BERTHA.

Maywood,  
Massachusetts.  
Tuesday.

DEAR ERN:

Mother has just got a letter from father saying he was going down to Princeton to see you for a few days. Father hasn't been at all well lately. Nights when he comes home, he seems awfully tired. In fact, he looks *all in*. And I want you to see that he doesn't have a chance to think of



business while he's there. Of course I understand that it is something of a problem to entertain one's father at college. For though we have the best parents that ever children were blessed with, it's ridiculous to think that we can ever quite understand each other. They've had *their* experiences and we've had *ours* and of course there's no—what you might call *neutral ground*—on which we can come together. Personally I think they were too proper in those days to really enjoy themselves. At the same time, Ern, I don't want you to leave a *stone unturned* that means giving father a good time. And if you need any extra money, don't ask him for it. I've saved up eleven dollars and eighty-three cents and I'll gladly contribute it to the cause.

Your aff. sister,

PHOEBE.

Princeton,

New Jersey.

Wednesday.

DEAR PHOEB:

Say, you make me tired asking me to be good to father and offering me that money. I guess I'm not piker enough—or tight-wad enough—to let father come down here and not do anything for him. I'll turn myself inside out. And who do you suppose blew in yesterday morning—Tug. He's traveling in this vicinity for a few days and he's going to make Princeton his center. He was tickled to death to hear father was coming. Blanche Williston has three Radcliffe girls visiting her—queens! Did you ever meet any of them—Eunice Dunster, Janet George, and Nora Riley—they all live about Boston. Maybe Sandy and I haven't

jollied them within an inch of their lives about Harvard. I took Tug to call there last night and we all went for a long walk. I think Eunice is the prettiest but Tug is strong for Janet. Tug's writing you now and he'll tell you all about it. The Willistons have invited us there for Saturday evening and when I told Sandy that father would be here, he said to bring him right along. Of course I said I would. But to tell the truth I'm dreading that a little, for I'm afraid those girls won't take any notice of father and he'll be bored. It is funny when you stop to think of it how many more experiences and so much more interesting ones the young people of to-day have—compared with what father and mother had. I'm glad I live in these times. I bet it was slow at Harvard when father went.

Your loving brother,

ERNEST MARTIN.

The picture that the living-room presented was one that had duplicated itself every evening for three months—a big fire burning red, a big student-lamp gleaming yellow, a big center table dotted with spools, foaming with long-cloth, lawn, damask, glittering with scissors, needles, pins, netted with skeins of embroidery linen, cards of tape, bundles of lace. On one side, Mrs. Martin, stooped, sweetly faded, blonde, rippled monologues placid as any softly-flowing brook. On the other side, Cousin Debbie, plump, brown, bright-eyed, clucked comments, excited as any busy hen.

It was a picture that, to the last detail, made for cheer and charm. But to Phoebe, coming swiftly

down the stairs, dashing even more swiftly across the hall, and pausing for a silent moment in the doorway, it apparently carried no comfort. She did not even look at it. She stood tall and tense, her eyes flashing out of the tangle of her frown, her teeth biting at her lip.

"Where are you going, little daughter?" Mrs. Martin asked.

Mrs. Martin did not raise her eyes from her sewing. But Cousin Debbie, turning slightly, surveyed with a certain covertness the spirited figure.

"To post this letter," Phoebe answered. Involuntarily her grasp tightened on the bulky envelope which she carried. "I want it to get the last mail." She did not go at once, however. Her gaze slid past the tête-à-tête pair, probed the fire, caught on some more vivid picture there, clutched, held tight.

In the meantime the broken conversation at the table mended itself. Bits of fact flashed out of its many-faceted composite.

"Oh, yes, the boys are having a perfectly lovely time," Mrs. Martin was saying. "It was so nice that Tug happened to be there, too. Ernie writes that he and Tug have been down to the Willistons' all the time, walking or motoring with those four college girls. Edward'll be there to-night and——"

Phoebe suddenly flashed about and darted through the hall. The front door shut. The bang which unavoidably proclaimed arrival or departure to the Martin household seemed to ring with something positively vicious.

"Phoebe doesn't seem quite herself these last two or three days, Bertha," said Cousin Debbie. "I don't know that I've ever seen her so sort of indifferent and absent."

"I hadn't noticed it," said Mrs. Martin. She stopped sewing an instant and her face assumed the serious, preoccupied look of one who is running swiftly through the foreground of the past. "I guess it's staying indoors and sewing so hard. She doesn't get so very much exercise with both Ernie and Tug away, you know. And I have never been one to let her go out alone at night. She says herself that any engaged girl whose—'steady' she calls him—is away might just as well be dead. It's queer how quiet the house is. So few young men come here now."

"It was just the same when you were engaged to Edward," said Cousin Debbie. "Don't you remember how lonesome it was at first? All the boys stopped coming—except Jim Bassett. Do you recall how jealous Ed used to get of him?"

Mrs. Martin laughed, and there was a ring of conscious coquetry to her mirth.

Again the door opened—shut with its accustomed bang. "Is that rain, Phoebe?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Yes," Phoebe answered listlessly, "it's pouring."

The two women took up their talk; and this time the conversational plummet dropped into the past. Apparently Phoebe heard no word of it. She sank into a chair by the fire and stared into the flames.

The mental knot still showed itself on her smooth forehead. An interval of this stupor and she jumped up, dashed into the hall, flew up the stairs into her own room. She walked up and down, clasping and unclasping her hands. It was as if the mental knot had begun to untie. Then she threw herself face downward on the bed, buried her head in the pillow.

"Sometimes I think," Cousin Debbie was saying, "it worries Phoebe—Tug's being on the road. I think it frets her when his letters don't come. I notice, though, that when one day goes by without one, there's always two the next day. It's dreadful, though, his being away after the engagement's announced. I always say that's the hardest position a woman can be placed in."

Phoebe lay on her bed for nearly half an hour. Then she sat up. The mental knot had undoubtedly pulled itself loose. All the fire and flame had gone out of her manner. Every connotation of irresolution showed itself in her bowed shoulders and twisting hands. She pulled herself to her feet finally, drifted slowly over to the cedar chest, lifted the cover. For a long time she stood staring down on what lay there—a daintiness, peculiarly feminine, a daintiness of embroidered lawn, of lacy ruffles, of delicately tinted ribbon. From the cedar chest she moved over to the highboy, one of Aunt Mary's scorned mahogany treasures, recently resurrected from the barn because of its many drawers. Pano-plied rows, exquisitely embroidered, of her own initials, stared at her as she opened the drawers.

Suddenly Phoebe sank into a chair and burst into tears. Rocking convulsively back and forth, she cried until her handkerchief dripped. Then another impulse took her. She arose, dashed into the bathroom, bathed her face, recombined her hair, flew downstairs, into the library, took up the telephone receiver.

"What's the matter with the telephone, mother?" her distracted voice called in another moment.

"I don't know. Something happened this afternoon. I notified the telephone people right away, but they haven't come yet. If it's anything important, go over to Mrs. Warburton's."

"Oh, it's nothing in particular," said Phoebe. "It can wait." But her teeth tore at her lip again. And now her brow snarled with a look of perplexity. She resumed her place at the fire, resumed her study of the flames.

Gradually her face lightened. An idea—palpably it fascinated and frightened her, palpably again and again she rejected it only to recover it—seemed finally to harden to resolution. She arose, strolled through the back library, strolled through the hall, tiptoed into the kitchen. Opening the back door carefully, she flashed through the rain to the barn. In another moment, she emerged carrying a ladder. She walked with it round to the side of the house, placed it so that the top went through the open window of her room. Then re-entering the house, she shut the back door silently, tiptoed through the

kitchen, strolled through the hall, strolled into the living-room again.

"I feel awfully tired, mother," she said smoothly, taking up a magazine, "I propose that we go to bed early to-night."

"All right," said Mrs. Martin tranquilly.

"Bertha," Cousin Debbie said, and apparently she was striking off on a tangent from the main course of their talk, "were you ever jealous of Edward when he was on the road?"

"Jealous!" Mrs. Martin laughed. "I should say I was. Debbie, I never told you about Minnie Pratt, did I? No, I know I didn't. For I've never told anybody. Well, I'm going to tell you now. Do you remember how much Edward's traveling those years we were engaged took him off Seriph Four Corners way?"

"Oh, yes, seemed as if he was always there. I remember because my Aunt Nabbie lived in Seriph."

"Well, there was a girl lived there that he'd always known—Minnie Pratt. They'd been sweethearts in a boy and girl way. She was a kinder pretty girl—if you liked that style—great bold black eyes and jet-black hair that she wore in those beaut-catcher curls. I don't know as you ever saw it, but there was a picture of her round in Edward's room for a long while."

"I want to know! I always thought that was some relation of Edward's."

"Well—it *wasn't*," said Mrs. Martin with emphasis. "He used to go to supper at their house

whenever he was in Seriph—Mrs. Pratt had been an old friend of his mother's—and of course sometimes Edward would take Minnie places as a sort of return for their hospitality. Not that he wasn't perfectly fair about it. She knew all about our engagement. Well, one day—I can't recall now just what it was made me mad; but I'd been getting a lot of letters with too much Minnie in them. And—and—well, the long and short of it was that I sat right down and wrote Edward a letter, breaking the engagement."

"Bertha, you *don't!*" said Debbie, horrified.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Martin with the pride we all take in our own unreasonableness, "I did. And I told him he needn't write to me, for I'd tear up, unread, any letter he sent me. I did, too. They kept coming by every mail for two weeks. But he couldn't write them any faster than I could tear them up. Then all of a sudden they stopped."

Mrs. Martin also stopped. She bit off a piece of thread, thrust it into the eye of the needle. Phoebe lifted her gaze—for five minutes it had been riveted on the same page of her magazine—and fixed it on her mother. A little stir of interest rippled across her face.

"It was one thing to order Edward not to write and it was another to have him take me at my word. I put in the most dreadful week I have ever known in all my life except when the children have been sick. I certainly thought I would *die*. My pride would not let me give in. But I said to myself if



Edward would only write me one more letter, I'd make up. And, oh, how I looked for it! But it didn't come and it didn't come. It got toward the end of the third week and I thought I'd go crazy. By that time I'd lost all account of Edward's travel-schedule. But I knew that the first of every month he had to be in Pocohonkit. I knew—because he always dreaded it. The trains ran so that he used to get into Eldersville at two in the morning and wait a whole hour for the train to Pocohonkit. So I was certain that, unless something happened, Edward would be in the Eldersville station from two until three Thursday night of that third week. And what do you suppose I did? ”

“Go on,” Cousin Debbie implored.

“You know how poor we were in those days, Debbie? ”

Cousin Debbie nodded.

“Why, Debbie, there would be weeks at a time when mother wouldn't have a cent in the house. We had garden truck and the chickens, and mother would run up a bill until Aunt Mary's allowance came in. But as for money, she rarely saw any and I never did. I hadn't at that time a cent to my name. Neither had mother. I wasn't the kind that could borrow; besides I didn't want anybody to know what I was going to do. But I did own three pieces of jewelry—that string of gold beads that I'd always had, the one Phoebe wears now—a pin of jet and pearl that Aunt Mary gave me, the one I gave to that Mrs. Ventry I was telling you about

the other day—and a lovely little brooch of carved ivory that Miss Summers brought me back from Switzerland. Well, I waited until everybody had gone to sleep that night and then when the clock struck twelve I got up and dressed, climbed out my window, and walked to Campion Center.”

“Did you meet anybody?” Debbie asked breathlessly.

“Not a living soul—not so far’s I know. And I guess,” Mrs. Martin said with a grim emphasis, “if anybody had seen me I’d have heard of it. You know North Campion. Well, I walked in on the ticket-seller in Campion Center and told him I wanted a ticket to Wissigissett. I told him that I hadn’t any money, but that it was a matter almost of life and death; and I’d leave the jet and pearl brooch as security.”

“Why, Bertha Brooks!” said Cousin Debbie as if they were girls again, “if you don’t beat the Dutch!”

“He looked at me for about a minute,” Mrs. Martin went on, “and I looked at him. I remember him perfectly—he was a fat man with a kinder jolly face. Then he said, ‘All right.’ That’s all there was to that. He handed me the ticket and I handed him the brooch and pretty soon the train came along and I took it. I got to Wissigissett at one-twenty. I had to change there into a train to Braley. It was only a five minutes’ ride and I could have walked it easy, but I had to make connections with the one-forty-five at Eldersville. I told the

Braley ticket man just what I told the other one and offered him the carved ivory brooch."

"What did he say?"

Mrs. Martin laughed. "I can see that man yet—he was sort of pious-looking—with one of those serious sort of faces with little near-together eyes. He said, 'Are you sure there is nothing criminal about this?' I had to laugh at that and I came right out with it. I said, 'I've quarreled with my beau and I want to see him to-night.' He said, 'I don't want your pin and I'll pay for your ticket. But that's just like a woman—raising the dickens when a man's away off and can't get to her. I hope it's a lesson to you.' I couldn't make him take the brooch. And, finally the train came along, I said, 'All right, I'll pay you back some day.' I got to Braley at quarter-past one. The ticket man there wasn't so nice as the others."

"What did he do?" Cousin Debbie demanded breathlessly.

"He didn't do anything—but he said I was an awful pretty girl to be wandering round that hour of night alone. He was one of those conceited-looking men. He had a black mustache with little curls on the end of it and he kept twisting it while he talked with me. He offered me a five-dollar bill. But of course I didn't touch it. I did take the ticket, though, and I made him take the gold beads. I got into Eldersville at exactly half-past two—and—well, I wish you could have seen Edward Martin's face when he saw me coming out of that car."



“Mother Martin,” Phoebe said, bursting into the conversation, “is that true, every word of it?”



"What *did* he say?" Debbie asked.

"It was a minute before he could say anything. But after that, we certainly did do some talking."

"What time did you get back?"

"About four. I climbed in through the back sitting-room window without a soul hearing me. And nobody's ever known about it until this day, not even mother."

"How did you ever get your things again?"

"Edward gave me the money to redeem them on my way home. I was the whole summer earning money to pay him back. Oh, wasn't he mad that I did it! He threw one dollar that I gave him into the river, and I nearly broke the engagement again. I never heard such a crazy thing—throwing good money away!"

"Mother Martin," Phoebe said, bursting into the conversation with the air of one who can no longer control herself, "is that true, every word of it?"

Mrs. Martin laughed and nodded. There was a slight embarrassment in her manner. But an emotion much stronger—a reminiscent delight in her own escapade—had fired her eyes and curved her lips. Her cheeks flaunted a pink almost velvety. Looking at her closely, you might have seen the girl of thirty years before. Perhaps Phoebe saw this girl, for she stared hard.

"Well, mother," she said slowly, "I can't imagine *you* doing such a thing. I wouldn't have thought it was *in* you." She added after another long, strange look: "I don't wonder the man tried

to flirt with you, though—you must have been a perfect peach.”

“Well,” said Cousin Debbie with an emphasis almost indignant, “I should say she was. She was the handsomest girl in North Campion. You’ll do very well, miss, if you’re ever as good-looking as your mother was.”

But Phoebe did not answer. She did not seem to hear. She was still examining her mother with that long, strange, preoccupied scrutiny.

The talk drifted far afield. An hour went by. Phoebe tried to read her magazine, but a restlessness that increased with every moment harried her. Again and again she reminded her mother and her cousin that they ought to be tired. But the two women continued to dawdle over their sewing. It was eleven o’clock before the last sound in the house died down.

Phoebe did not go to bed at all. Fully dressed she sat quietly in her room until the clock struck twelve. Then she put on her hat and rubbers, threw her raincoat out the window. Exercising phenomenal care, she climbed down the ladder, pulled on her coat, tiptoed over the lawn. Two minutes later she was running down the street.

An hour afterwards a tall slender girl, dripping water at every angle, eyes and cheeks aflame, curls frescoed on her damp forehead down to her very eyebrows, burst into the railroad station at Rose-dale.

The telegram which, after many false starts, she

finally composed was brief. Addressed to Mr. Toland Warburton, Princeton Inn, Princeton, New Jersey, it read:

Send back last letter unread, and if read, disregard utterly. Undying love and faith,

PHOEBE.

"Say, Tug," Ernest said over the telephone, early Saturday evening, "Sandy and I have fixed it to have some bridge whist and a rabbit this evening on father's account. Now you never can tell how girls will act. So if it gets slow, jump in and make things whiz, won't you? I don't suppose father will have much use for those girls or they for him. But I guess, between us, you and I can keep things going."

"Sure," agreed the cheerful Tug, "I shall open my face wide the moment we get inside the door and I shan't close it until we say *au revoir*. I am the champion long-distance talker of the United States and Canada and my specialty is speeding things up."

"Oh, and say, Tug," Ernest went on, "Sandy and I have got a new jolly for those Radcliffe girls. Sandy wanted me to tell you, so you wouldn't think he was really slamming Harvard."

"Do your darnedest," advised the serene Tug. "I think those four Radcliffe maids are quite able to take care of themselves."

"Oh, and, Tug," Ernest added, "I have an engagement late this evening, after it's all over. I



don't want father to know anything about it. But you suggest leaving me at my street. See!"

"I'm on," answered the buoyant Tug.

"Mrs. Williston," Ernest was saying an hour later to the pleasant woman—ample, white-haired, and fifty—who arose to greet them, "let me introduce my father, and,"—this to a quartette of beauties who sat wedged on a couch,—“Miss Williston, Miss Dunster, Miss George, Miss Riley, my father.”

The quartette of beauties bowed politely. Mrs. Williston added to her cordial greeting: “Mr. Martin, I'm going to ask you if you will chaperon this quartette of young people to-night in my place. We've just heard of the illness of a very old friend. Mr. Williston has gone on ahead and I must join him now. I hope you will excuse me, but it is a case where we can do nothing else.”

Mr. Martin excused her with the requisite graciousness. He accompanied her to her car, put her into it, with protestations, constantly renewed, of delight in his new rôle. As he returned to the pleasant library, he caught the words, “Radcliffe” and “Harvard.” But apparently the fair quartette on the couch had neither stirred nor spoken.

“Mr. Martin,” suddenly said the peachy-cheeked, honey-haired, heroic-size blondness that was Eunice Dunster, “we welcome you to these alien halls of learning. For one week, we have put in most of our time refuting the knocks of ignorant Princetonians in regard to Harvard University. We have had almost no assistance from Mr. Warburton, who,

although a Harvard man, is afraid of losing his Princeton pull, and less from Miss Williston, who, possessing a Princeton brother, confesses to divided allegiances. Your son says that you are a Harvard man. We would like to ask you if in your day the other colleges were as frantically jealous of Harvard as they are now?"

Mr. Martin met with his twinkle the sunny azure mischief of Miss Dunster's glance. "It was even so in those days, Miss Dunster," he affirmed seriously, "black, bitter, biting envy beset us on every side."

"Mr. Martin," said the delicate, slender Gallic bruneness that was Janet George, "for a child's size college, Princeton is a very pretty toy. Is it not so?"

Mr. Martin met with his twinkle the liquid, long-lashed glee of Miss George's gaze. "I have no doubt whatever, Miss George," he assented gravely, "that Princeton will qualify as soon as it grows up."

"Mr. Martin," said the willowy, violet-eyed Irishness that was Nora Riley, "why is it that we permit these minor mushroom universities to exist? Is it not our duty to rise in our might some time and raze them to the ground?"

Mr. Martin met with his twinkle the freckled, dimpled archness of Nora's gaze. "I believe this is the one case above all the others, Miss Riley," he pronounced solemnly, "when we should temper justice with mercy."

Miss Williston moved away from Miss Dunster. "The gentleman qualifies. Mr. Martin, will you kindly join the Harvard forces on the couch?"

Still twinkling, Mr. Martin squeezed his big bulk into the place the two girls made. He surveyed them all with his amused, indulgent gaze.

"Now," said Ernest briskly, "I tell you what let's do. There are just eight of us. How about bridge?"

"Not for a moment," said Miss Dunster decisively. "If the gods have favored us so far as to send one of themselves—that is to say, a real Harvard man—right down in our midst, shall we flout them by indulging in piffling games and sports? By Memorial Hall, nay, by Hollis, Holworthy, and Gray's, twice nay, by the statue of John Harvard, thrice nay! Mr. Martin, let our conversation be of our alma mater and pater. Did you perchance ever do any acting when you were at Harvard?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Martin, "I wasn't very much of an actor myself. But I was always on committees to get plays up. We did Ben Jonson's 'Bartholomew Fair,' Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer,' Sheridan's 'The Rivals,' and——"

"'The Rivals!'" Miss Dunster exclaimed. "Did you really? Why, we're getting up 'The Rivals' at Radcliffe for the spring Emmanuel. Nora's chairman of the committee—the martyred angel. Blanche is playing Bob Acres. Janet's Lydia Languish and I'm Sir Lucius. Oh, I say, Mr. Martin, do you remember any of the business?"

"I should say I did," answered Mr. Martin with fervor. "About three weeks before our play came off, Joe Jefferson showed in 'The Rivals' in Boston. I went six times just to take notes on the business. I know that play from A to Z and from omega to alpha."

"Shades of the sacred Harvard quadrangle!" exclaimed Nora Riley, "we've struck oil—a gusher! Girls, this is where we take Mr. Martin by the forelock. Help me clean this table off, Janet. Eunice, you go upstairs and get the books. Blanche, rustle paper and pencils. You wouldn't mind going through the play with us, would you, Mr. Martin? It will only take a little while."

"I should enjoy it enormously," said Mr. Martin.

"Say, Blanche, why don't you put that off until some other time?" said Sandy, "Mr. Martin hasn't a very long time to stay here, and I'm sure to-night he'd——"

"Because," interrupted Blanche, "we want to do it now. And don't you suppose Mr. Martin prefers the company of people who bear ever the hallmark of Harvard, who carry always the aura of Cambridge, to the riffraff of other colleges? Hurry up, *mes enfants!*"

Five minutes later Mr. Martin found himself seated before the bared center-table, a girl suspended at either shoulder and two leaning so far across the table that their heads almost bumped his and all hanging on his words.

Tug and Sandy merged themselves with a game

of chess. Ernest fell on the pile of magazines that had been shoveled from the table.

"Check!" said Tug at the end of an hour.

"Say, father," hinted Ernest after an aimless interval of three-cornered, masculine talk, "aren't you most finished with that stuff? I'm sure the girls are ready to play now."

"Finished!" answered Blanche Williston, "we've hardly begun. Now I tell you what you three do. You run upstairs and play billiards and don't bother us any longer. What was that point about the positions at the beginning of the duel-scene, Mr. Martin? I didn't entirely get that."

Three-quarters of an hour later Ernest returned to the library. "Sandy says," he announced sulkily, "that he's hungry and would like the rabbit now."

"Mr. Martin," said Janet George, "will you kindly request that obnoxious Princeton person not to interrupt us again?"

"Ernest," ordered his father without looking up, "go into a corner and stand with your face to the wall."

Half an hour later Ernest again entered. "Sandy says that the table is set," he announced stiffly, "and the cheese all cut up, and——"

"Mr. Martin," interrupted Eunice Dunster, "I see now why you didn't send him to Harvard—he wasn't good enough."

"Ernest," implored his father, "don't stand there any longer, bringing my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

Fifteen minutes later Ernest reappeared in the doorway. "Sandy says," he emitted in a single breath, "that the rabbit's all cooked and if you don't come now, you can take it cold." Before anybody could administer rebuke he vanished.

The group at the table arose, laughing and talking, filed into the dining-room. The girls, bunching themselves about Mr. Martin, absently accepted the plates that were handed them.

"Well, if you could have seen what happened the night we gave it in Seriph Four Corners," Mr. Martin was concluding, "you'd have——"

"Seriph Four Corners!" Eunice Dunster exclaimed. "Why, my mother came from Seriph. I wonder if you knew her. Her name was Minnie Pratt. My goodness *gracious*, are you *Edward* Martin?"

"That's who I am," Mr. Martin confessed. "Of course I knew your mother. She was one of the nicest girls I ever met—and one of the prettiest."

Eunice unfastened the chain that hung about her neck, opened the pendant locket, handed it to Mr. Martin.

"Yes, that's Minnie," said Mr. Martin, smiling a little. "You don't look like her, do you?"

"No," said Eunice regretfully, "everybody says I'm a Dunster. I can't believe you're Edward Martin. My mother's told us children a thousand times how you walked right up to a man with a gun, took it away from him, and thrashed him because he'd been beating his mother. Why, girls, when Mr.

Martin was at Harvard, he was—— Well, mother's told me many a time how you helped paint John Harvard red and how you put the alarm-clocks in Professor Moy's recitation-room. Girls, they went off at five-minute intervals during the entire lecture. Mother said you had the greatest collection of funny signs—she said you stole one out of a police-station. Mother always insists that you hung the skeleton onto the flagpole that time. Did you?"

Mr. Martin shook his head decisively. "Oh, no!" he said.

"Mother says you always say 'no,'" continued Eunice. "She says you were all sworn to deny it to the end of your days." She stopped and stared at Mr. Martin, an imp of mischief dancing in each blue eye. "I bet you did it," she wheedled.

Except for his twinkle, Mr. Martin sustained her accusing gaze equably. "I bet I didn't," he asseverated.

The imps vanished from Eunice's eyes. Her gaze became a little dreamy. "Just think of your being Edward Martin," she murmured half to herself. "Why, I've heard of you all my life. You've been a sort of legendary hero to us children. I don't know what mother will say when I write her that I've met you. What I can't get over, though, is your seeming so young—so much younger than mother."

"What I can't get over," said Mr. Martin, "is Minnie's having a great girl like you."

“Ernest Martin,” said Eunice, “it doesn’t seem possible that Edward Martin can be your father. He seems more like your brother.”

Ernest looked up, startled.

Mr. Martin was a heavy man, but his bulk all ran to shape. His hair was perfectly white, but it was thick and the ends broke into a crisp ripple. The effect, moreover, of the lineless floridity of his face, the quizzical geniality of his clear hazel eyes was to make this seem a premature silvering. Somehow he seemed to gain rather than lose in youthfulness by contrast with the cluster of beautiful girl-faces. Ernest realized, as he never could before, what Phoebe meant when she said that he looked like a leading-man in a play.

And then—how did it come up?—suddenly he saw his father from an angle of mental vision so different from the physical one that it was as if he were seeing him for the first time. He saw him divorced utterly from his aspect of husband and parent. He saw him as a human being among human beings. He saw him as a man among men. He saw him as a man among women. Why, his part in the game of life had been as red-blooded as Ernest’s own. He had taken all a male’s chances, both of the body and of the soul. He had hit his man. He had kissed his maid. His father! *His father!* The sensation bothered Ernest. It brought a strange perplexity, an irritation. He tried to throw it off. He tried mentally to push his father back into his place—to settle him in that station of



the middle years, where paternally white-haired, not youthfully so, he should hover forever on the brink of old age.

Ernest stared at his father.

The imps of mischief began to dance again in Miss Dunster's eyes.

"My mother has told me many times, Mr. Martin," she said with the serene effrontery of comely youth, "that all the Seriph girls were perfectly crazy about you."

"They managed to conceal it from me," retorted Mr. Martin.

"Girls!" Eunice addressed the allied forces of her own sex, but she did not take the sparkle of her gaze from Mr. Martin's face. "We must beware of this man. He was a perfectly dreadful flirt—according to tradition—although mother does say he was a *dear*."

"I can listen to this conversation," Mr. Martin maintained, unruffled, "all the rest of the evening."

"All right." Eunice continued her remarks with a demure relentlessness. "Mother said that you had the prettiest curly hair and the longest eyelashes that she ever saw. She says it was a terrible pity that they were wasted on a man."

Mr. Martin did not bat a single one of the eyelashes under discussion. He continued to stare his tormentor straight in the face.

"Seems to me, girls," concluded Eunice, verbally signaling for reinforcements, "that the eyelashes are still rather long."

The heavy artillery galloped onto the field.

"This way for the eyelashes!" directed Janet George.

The three girls moved closer and carefully surveyed their victim.

"Kindly remove your glasses," ordered Blanche Williston.

Mr. Martin obeyed promptly.

"Now shut your eyes," coaxed Nora Riley.

Mr. Martin burst out laughing. He jumped up and walked to the other side of the room. "My hands are up!" he admitted.

Ernest continued to stare.

"Well, Mr. Martin," Eunice went on, "you must promise us three things before you leave. One is that just as soon as you go home you and Mrs. Martin will look mother up. She's always wondered what became of you. She said that you married a girl that looked like an angel."

"All right," said Mr. Martin. "What's number two?"

"That you'll come to see us do 'The Rivals.'"

"Of course I will," agreed Mr. Martin. "Number three?"

"That you'll come to the Open Idler this spring and dance with every girl we introduce you to. Mother says that you were a perfectly heavenly dancer. Will you?"

"All right," said Mr. Martin.

And still Ernest stared—stared at the ghost of his father's youth.

An hour later, clad in overalls, a pot of green paint, plopping and dripping from his belt, a new paint-brush held between his teeth, Ernest was climbing perilously up the props of the water tower. Below in the shrubbery skulked half a dozen sophomores, keeping guard. Two perils added their agreeable excitement to Ernest's undertaking: first and least that he might break his neck, second that he would be suspended instantly if discovered. Slowly, carefully, he pulled himself up. His hand did not falter, however, nor his resolution shake. Arrived at the tip-top, he painted his class-numerals on the tower with the boldest sweep of green that his peril would permit. And having finished, he climbed down, doffed his disguise, strolled back to tranquil sleep.

After Mr. Martin left Ernest, he went directly to the Inn. Once in his room, however, a strange restlessness fell upon him. He walked up and down, stopping now and then to fall into a brown study. Coming abruptly out of the last of these reveries, he moved over to the window. For a long time he stood there looking out on a patch of starlit lawn. Finally he sat down at the desk and began to write.

Princeton Inn,  
Princeton, N. J.

Saturday, late.

MY DEAR BERTHA:

I think I'll return to New York to-morrow. I'll have to be at the Waldorf for a day or two—then I'll come

home. I've had all I want of college life for a while. It all sounds so foolish and shallow here. I don't believe we were like that at Harvard in my day. By George, I know we weren't. Why, at Ernest's age, I was painting John Harvard red and stealing signs out of police-stations. Do you remember the time we set off the eight alarm-clocks during Professor Moy's lecture? Do you remember the time we precipitated the race-riot in Memorial? Why, Ernest lives the correct, bloodless life of the store-window mannikin. Not that I want him to be the offensive type of college man. But—— Well, I'm glad I'm not Ernest. Love to you and Phoebe!

Your affectionate husband,

EDWARD MARTIN.

P.S.—Oh, by the way, I met Minnie Pratt's daughter at the Willistons' to-night. I promised we'd look them up when I got back. I'd really like to do that.

2 P.S.—I have always forgotten to ask Ernest if he bought those flannels—but I didn't notice that he shivered any.

DEAR EDWARD:

I understand in a way how you feel about Ernie's college life. I think there's nobody so old as the young people nowadays. Just the same I'm glad Ernie is not cutting up. It's very rough and ungentlemanly, besides being dangerous. If Ernest should get arrested, I don't know what I'd do. Lois Lynch was in last night and she said that her brother, who's a Freshman at Princeton, wrote home that some of the sophomores painted the class numbers on the water-tower the other night. They'd been expelled if

they'd been found out. I should feel awfully if Ernie got mixed up with anything like that.

I guess I'll have to believe in mental telegraphy after this. For while you were talking with Minnie Pratt's daughter, I was telling Debbie how I went over to Eldersville in the middle of the night to talk half an hour with you after a quarrel. Edward, I've been thinking over Phoebe and Tug, and they don't care for each other the way we did. Not that I'd like to have Phoebe do anything like that exactly. Why, Edward, they don't even realize what fun it is quarreling.

We are well, except Phoebe. She has a dreadful cold and I can't think how she got it.

Your loving wife,

BERTHA.

P.S.—You never said what Minnie Pratt's married name was, but I'd love to go to call on her.

DEAR ERN:

I have a perfectly awful cold from taking a long walk in the rain, so I can't write much this time. I'm glad father had such a good time in Princeton but I wish he'd stayed longer. I'm going to take back one thing I said about father and mother. I guess they've had experiences just as interesting as ours—and *maybe more so*. Anyway, Ern Martin, if you don't realize that Mother Martin must have been a *perfect wonder*, I now announce to you that that's what she was.

Your aff. sister,

PHOEBE.

DEAR PHOEBE:

Yes, I'm sorry that father went home so soon, but he said he had a good time and I think he did. I feel just the same way about father that you do about mother—he's no back number and don't you forget it.

Your loving brother,

ERN.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HOUSE BOOK

**T**HE day after Christmas.

The most wonderful thing that ever happened to me, since Mrs. Warburton asked me to go abroad, happened yesterday. It was a Christmas gift. It came in my Christmas stocking. It was a house. I don't mean that a house came in the stocking. But a note from Tug's father did. And the note said that his Christmas gift to Tug and me was a house for us to live in after we were married. Think of it, a house. I'm going to write it again. *A house!* Once more and maybe I can believe it. **A HOUSE!** The house isn't built yet, but it's going to be built right here in Maywood on any one of a dozen lots that Mr. Warburton owns. Mr. Warburton said it could be any kind of a house Tug and I wanted. We could buy a house already built or build one to suit ourselves—anything, provided we did not spend more than five thousand dollars. Well, of course, I went just about crazy with delight, and all day long my head was in a perfect whirl. After all the Christmas excitement was over, Tug and I had a long talk.

Of course I knew at once that this problem was entirely up to me. Tug wouldn't know anything

about it; even if he ever thought of it. I decided immediately that I wanted to build. There are no houses in Maywood that appeal to me especially. In fact the only vacant one I can think of is the old ramshackle Durland place that's had a *For Sale* sign in the orchard ever since I can remember. And I wouldn't live *there* for forty red apples. When it comes to *architecture*, I don't exactly know yet what I *do* want, but I know perfectly well what I *don't* want. I distinctly don't want a house like this. Of course I've always lived in it and I'm fond of it *after a fashion*. It is big and square and straight and tiresome—geometric almost—the kind of house a child draws on a slate. But I want something different. I don't know exactly how to put it. *Fussy* isn't the word. I want it sort of cut-up and unexpected with all kinds of little *butt-out* and all kinds of little *butt-in* places with fancy things like oriel windows, a chimney outside, a pergola, and porches tucked just everywhere—more on the order of the Warburton place. In fact, I want the keynote of my house to be *up-to-dateness*. Our house is far from up-to-date—that is as far as the house itself is concerned. The furnishings are absolutely the last cry. And I flatter myself that I am responsible for that. Until a few years ago we had no furniture at all but what mother inherited from Aunt Mary. Everything was hopelessly behind the times. There wasn't a smart effect *anywhere*. Well, after I grew up, I saw there ought to be a change if we were to have any social position what-



ever. I almost had to get down on my bended knees; but I finally persuaded father and mother to do the place over in red and green cartridge, mission furniture, Russian brass, and some modern china. Then I brought a lot of bric-à-brac from abroad that gave nifty little touches here and there. There isn't a thing in it now that I would change. I shall duplicate many of the effects in my own home.

That matter settled, Tug and I spent the whole afternoon and evening drawing up plans for the house. It was twelve o'clock before we finished and *then* mother had to send Tug home. Tug is going to show them to Jake Pebworth, an architect friend of his, and get an estimate on them. I guess Mr. Pebworth will be surprised to see what a business-like job two amateurs have turned out. After all, you can tackle anything in this life if you only use *common sense*—now this wasn't so very different from a dress pattern. Tug and I decided that we could not possibly get along with less than twelve rooms, a downstairs living-room, library, dining-room, kitchen, an upstairs living-room, four chambers, a garret, and two maids' rooms. We shall have to have at least three bathrooms—one for our guests, one for the maids, and one for ourselves. I really think we ought to have four—but I am willing to economize in this one thing.

In talking it over, Tug and I made a solemn oath that we would each do our best to keep the other from growing into a typical married person. That is the only "out" about marriage—the change

it makes in you. It's just as if you caught a *stupid microbe* of some sort; for all married people start in being fearful bores the moment the ceremony is over. And the dreadful thing about it is that they're so unconscious of the change—they seem quite happy and contented, even *superior*, as if they had discovered a kind of happiness that nobody else ever thought of. They act as if they'd invented it. Well, Tug and I are not going to be like that. If I thought I was ever going to grow into the kind of woman Lila Ellis is, I don't know what I'd do. Lila used to be a *perfect pippin* and about the smartest girl in Maywood. How I used to look up to her when I was in High. Why, if Lila Ellis just spoke to me, I thought I was *made*. Well, she married Will Ellis and she's had four children in seven years. She's grown fat. Her hair is gray at one side—and she doesn't even try to conceal it. She does nothing all day long but push a baby-carriage, and as for her clothes—the least said about them the better. Now Irene Hunt is the greatest possible contrast to Lila. She's been married just as long, but she's kept her figure, and my goodness the clothes that girl has! To be sure she's had no children. Children seem to interfere with so much somehow.

No, Tug and I are going to make it a point to keep right on with everything, dancing particularly. I'm going to try to make my house a sort of *rendezvous* for the young people. And every night that we are alone, we're going to read aloud to each

other, so that we won't rust. Most people lose all interest in everything that's going on in the world the moment they get married. They seem to think of nothing but their children. Now I want my children to think of me the way I think of my mother and father. My mother isn't what you call a highly educated woman—that is, she isn't a college graduate. But she's kept her eyes and ears open all right! She doesn't talk so much, but I notice when she does open her mouth, people *listen*. As for my father, well, my father is a perfect *mine of information*. He is up on every question of the day. Tug says he has never met a better informed man. Ern Martin will never be the man father is; not if he lives to be ninety.

Ever since I read Mr. Warburton's note, my head has been teeming with ideas for architecture and interior decoration. What a help my trip abroad will be! Even my visit in New York will furnish me with many practical ideas. I remember some of the up-to-date schemes in Mrs. Raeburn's house, like, for instance, having two ice-chests, one for the desserts only, a linen-closet with slatted shelves so the clothes can air all the time, lights in the closets, etc. Last night after I got to bed, I made up my mind that I would keep a sort of diary of the house—a *house book*, so to speak. This morning I went down to the Center and bought this leather-covered blankbook (*eighty-five cents* was all they stung me for it), and I'm going to write in it every plan and idea and thought that I have in regard to the house.

I'm not going to read from day to day what I have written, so that I can go at the problem fresh every morning, not biassed by what's happened before. And when the house is finished and the book is done, I'm going to tie it with yellow ribbon and seal it with great scarlet seals, and the day that Tug and I have been married twenty-five years, I'm going to get it out and read it to him. We can thus live all over again what will probably prove to be the happiest period of our life. It almost reconciles me to growing old.

This is all for to-day.

January 5.

Tug saw Jake Pebworth to-day about the plans we drew up Christmas night, and he said that, after he had put in stairways and closets and had allowed for plumbing and a furnace, the house would probably not cost us more than fifteen thousand dollars. Fifteen thousand! Goodness! I hadn't any idea that it took so much money to build. I'm afraid we'll have to get along with two bathrooms. I suppose, on a pinch, we could do without that upstairs living-room, seeing we have what you might call two living-rooms downstairs. Mr. Pebworth didn't seem to think much of the plans and suggested that we wait and look about before we did anything more about it. At first it quite discouraged me. But now I'm very glad those plans proved lemons; for I have changed my mind completely. The other day when I was in Boston I subscribed to three illustrated

magazines—"The Architectural Record," "The Interior," and "The Builder," and I have been getting out bound copies of past numbers from the library. I didn't know that there were so many ways of building houses. It seemed to me that my plans changed every time I turned a page; for each picture was lovelier than the last. Finally, however, I boiled my ideas down to three. Number one was to put up an exact duplicate of Anne Hathaway's cottage. I thought it was perfectly darling when I was there, but it did not occur to me how lovely it would be to live in until I saw some beautiful pictures of it. Number two was to build an Italian villa—like the one that Mr. Waring had in Fiesole. It was a great, roomy, simple place with just the most *subtle* and *simple* ideas in decoration inside and a formal garden outside. Number three (and on the whole this fascinated me more than any) was to have a Spanish hacienda—everything on one floor and all built around a square interior court with a flower-garden and a fountain in the center. I was just full of this when Tug came to-night. Tug said (the way he always does, the angel love) not to consider him, but have exactly what I want. But he pointed out that a stone floor, like Anne Hathaway's cottage, would be cold as ice in winter. He said that when he was in Shottery, the caretaker told him that winters she nearly *died* of chilblains. Tug said, moreover, that he'd feel very anachronistic mixing a Bronx cocktail in an Elizabethan cottage. He said, "Think of hanging up

all my college flags in an Italian villa or inviting the boys to play billiards in a Spanish hacienda." Moreover, Tug pointed out to me that the Italian villa and the Spanish hacienda were invented specially for a *semi-tropical* climate. And when you come to think of it, an interior court with a fountain in it would look sort of *lonesome* all covered with snow. Well, I've sort of given up the idea; but I'm really dreadfully disappointed, for I think it would be a very original stunt. There are terrible obstacles in this life to anybody who tries to stray from the beaten path—especially in any *artistic* line.

January 8.

Mother and I had a long talk to-day. I told her how disappointed I was that I couldn't have an Italian villa or a Spanish hacienda. She said that she knew exactly how I felt because when she was married everybody was building what she called "Queen Annie" houses. (Isn't it darling of mother, she always pronounces *Anne* as if it were *Annie*. It is so quaint to hear her referring to *Queen Annie*. She says her mother always said Queen Annie and she never can break herself of it.) Mother said that she wanted a house that was just *strung* with bay windows. Goodness knows, I don't want a bay window. She said that the only reason that she and father ever got this great barn of a place was because it was going for almost nothing. She says she fell in love at once with the big room on the third floor which was called the Play-

room when we were children. She said that it proved a very wise choice; for all the children in the neighborhood always came here to play. Sometimes there'd be a dozen on rainy days. "Perhaps I didn't get the house I wanted," mother said, "but at least I always knew where my children were." Mother said, "Why don't you look up every house that's 'for sale' or 'to let' in town? You'll get more ideas from them than from all the books and magazines in the library." That struck me as a very valuable suggestion, and in the afternoon Tug and I started out. The first person we met was Lila Ellis in an old mangy fur-coat, wheeling that eternal baby-carriage. She stopped and spoke to us. She said that she had heard that we were going to build and if we ever wanted to talk with somebody who had learned much practical wisdom through bitter experience to come to her. Of course I was just as nice as I could be, but I should never think of going. I don't think Lila could tell *me* much, that is, judging by the way she dresses. To think that the day would ever come when I should feel so superior to Lila Ellis. Why, before her father married the second time and she was mistress of the great Doran house, she had everything that money could buy. It seemed as if there was a dance there every night.

We had hardly turned the corner when we ran into Callie Hunt. She stopped us, too. "Why don't you come over to my place?" she said. "You know you've never called on me yet." So we went.

Well, never in my born days have I seen anything so well kept! In the first place the house itself is all cut up just the way I like a house to be, everything opening into everything else, funny little unexpected seats and settles, nooks and corners, turns and twists. As for decoration—well, the artistic touch was *everywhere*. Then of course, as it is perfectly new, the floors, paper, paint, plaster are immaculate and what with all her new shiny furniture and her bright new rugs—well, it was Spotless Town all right. I never saw a house so, what you might call, *hygienically* clean. I didn't see a speck of dust anywhere. You see, Callie keeps everything behind glass. Her dining-room was just one gorgeous glitter of cut-glass, but every speck of it was in cabinets. The bric-à-brac in her living-room and drawing-room is kept in cabinets; her books are kept in cases with doors to them; there are glass tops to her tables, chiffoniers, and dressers. I do not think you could have put a pin down anywhere on her wall where there wasn't a picture, and Callie told me that she dusts *behind them* every day of her life. Well, the house showed the care. There wasn't a scratch or a dent or a spot or a stain or a speck on anything. Callie said that she was the oldest girl in a family of nine and she doesn't remember once to have seen in her home a room that she called tidy. She made up her mind if she ever got married she would have a *clean* house if she didn't have another blessed thing. She had planned to be a trained nurse, but she married Al Hunt just as soon as she came out



of the hospital and she sort of put all her training into her housekeeping, if you know what I mean. In her smart little morning frock she was such a contrast to Lila Ellis. She's been married five years and she's just as slender as when she was engaged and a great deal prettier. To be sure she has had no children; but I don't think that makes any difference. It's all up to the woman herself. If she lets herself get sloppy she'll run right down. If she doesn't, she'll look trim. Both as a woman and a housekeeper Callie was a great lesson to me.

I asked Tug after we got out if he didn't think she was a marvel, and he said—now aren't men queer—that he had never been so uncomfortable in his life. He said that the house felt like a sanatorium. He said the kitchen looked like an operating-room. He said he was absolutely sure that Callie sterilized everything we touched the moment we left the house. "I understand perfectly now," he said, "why Al Hunt is at the Club every night. He feels too much like an interne if he stays at home."

Well, after we left Callie's, we went to all the vacant houses and apartments in town—all except the old Durland place; of course there was no use in going there. And I guess I was never more discouraged in my life. Such teeny-weeny little rooms and such gigantic rents. I didn't see a single thing that I liked. I suppose this big house that I've always lived in has spoiled me for small ones. Tug

says that he's having Jake Pebworth out to dinner some day next week and he'll bring him here to talk things over and perhaps he can help us. I hope he can; for I certainly feel quite at sea.

January 11.

Tug brought Jake Pebworth over this evening. I like him tremendously, although I stand a little in awe of him. He's old and he's young, he's handsome and he's ugly, he's distinguished and he's insignificant all at once, if you know what I mean. He's not very tall and he has the figure of a boy of seventeen; he jumps about like a jack-in-the-box. On the other hand, his hair, which is quite long and tumbled, is iron-gray. But his eyes are as blue—as blue—as—*as blue*. His features are put onto his face every *which* way—his nose is simply indescribable—and yet the whole effect is—well, you keep looking at him, that's all there is to it—just the way you have to keep looking at an open fire, even when it tires your eyes.

The first thing he did was—what do you think—to go perfectly mad about our house! He went from room to room on the lower floor, simply exploding with admiration. Then he asked permission to go upstairs. He said it was one of the best-built houses that he ever saw in his life. He said the lines and proportions of it were perfect. He said it made even other houses that he'd ever seen in Maywood look *jerry-built*, whatever that means. Father just sat there and beamed. It was

nuts to him, for if there's one thing he's crazy about, it's this house. He hates to change anything about it—oh, what a struggle it was that time I got him to do it all over. Mr. Pebworth asked father all kinds of questions. He seemed particularly struck with the marble mantels and the chandeliers downstairs. I did love the chandeliers when I was a child. They have long garlands of brass, carved with grapes and tiny little foxes' heads peering out from them. But I have always hated the mantels—they look like mausoleums to me. I could never drape things over them in any really artistic way. Father told Mr. Pebworth a whole lot of stuff that was new to me. He said that Mr. Esdaile, who built the house, also built the Durland place. He was a crank on old things. Every time a fine old house was dismantled in Boston, he used to go in and buy parts of it. It seems that our stairway is a peach—the mahogany rail is very classy for some reason or other. Well, I have never seen anybody so crazy as Mr. Pebworth was. He lingered in every room. Finally he said that he had two women friends in Maywood, interior decorators, and did we mind if he called them up and asked them up to see our house? I knew at once who they were when he mentioned their names—a Miss Ralph and a Mrs. Hollet, who live on the Gardner Road, great friends of Mrs. Marsh's, fierce high-brows and terribly exclusive. Of course father and mother were very pleased. I did not think for one moment that they would come on such an informal invitation. But when I heard

what Mr. Pebworth said over the telephone, you would certainly have thought he was inviting them to see Buckingham Palace. They asked if they could bring a Miss Whiting, who happened to be calling on them. Miss Whiting is an artist. She has a studio on the Gardner Road that I've always been crazy to see the inside of. Well, the long and short of it was, up they beat it in a machine. Miss Ralph is little and wiry and quick and dark, with snapping black eyes, and Mrs. Hollet is big and massive and slow and sort of glacial. Miss Whiting is long and lippy, the very *personification of grace*, a regular Burne-Jones. Well, I guess artistic people must be alike, for they were just as bad as Mr. Pebworth. They raved about the rooms and they raved about the mantels and they raved about the chandeliers and the windows and the doors and even the latches on the doors. Mother and father just ate it up. Of course mother made her usual hit; and you could see they were crazy about her. I didn't feel so very comfortable myself. For when I advanced an opinion, they listened to me so sort of *hard* that it was really embarrassing. And sometimes before I'd get half through what I had to say I'd have a feeling that it wasn't especially worth saying anyway. I never had a sensation quite like it.

After a while they asked what we had on the wall before we put on the red and green cartridge. Mother told them all about the queer paper that was on the living-room and library, great big scenes. I remember how ashamed I used to be of it when I

was growing up—it was so antiquated and different from what everybody else had. They seemed to know all about it—they called it a “landscape” paper. They said it must have been the “Lady of the Lake” pattern.

I don’t know exactly how it all came about; but somebody, mother I think, mentioned Aunt Mary’s furniture and Miss Ralph asked if they could see it. Before we knew it, we were all traipsing out to the barn carrying lanterns and as muffled as if we were going motoring.

I didn’t realize how much stuff there was there—the old sideboard, the old maple highboy, the low-boy, a secretary, two or three old clocks, half a dozen old mirrors, eight or nine chests of drawers, chairs and couches and tables galore. They all seemed awfully interested in them. They examined them *microscopically*, I might say. They asked how long they had been in the barn and I told how we did the house all over a few years ago. And I guess they thought we did a good job, too. Mrs. Hollet asked mother if she had ever thought of selling the furniture and mother said she’d as soon think of selling one of us. Miss Ralph asked if she might come over some day and take pictures. It seems that the highboy is a six-legged one and that’s very rare. Miss Ralph is writing a book on old furniture and she illustrates it with photographs. It seems that Aunt Mary’s stuff is especially “good”—*good* is the word they always used. Fancy Aunt Mary’s stuff turning out to be *valuable*. The rest of the

evening Miss Ralph simply kept us in roars describing some of the funny experiences she's had hunting up old truck. They were all three awfully nice and they made mother and me promise that we'd come to call. And we're going in a few days.

January 15.

Yesterday mother received a note from Miss Whiting asking us if we would come to her studio to-day and have a cup of tea with her. Of course we were delighted to go and went. I came away perfectly crazy to build just such a place as she has. It's a bungalow—consisting of three rooms on one floor—a big studio (which is living-room, library, and bedroom), a dining-room, a kitchen. The other rooms didn't make such a hit with me—but, oh, that studio! She told me it was forty-one by twenty-three, and it has a great big fireplace. Such a wonderful place to give dances or charades or theatricals in! Of course it was interesting—all artists' places are. The furniture was mahogany. "But I have nothing that can compare with the beautiful things in your barn," she said. It's curious, but it had never entered my head that Aunt Mary's things were *beautiful*. I suppose it was because I was brought up with them. But she had many foreign things that took the curse off. After we had been there a long time, Miss Whiting began to talk about the difficulty of getting models. I paid no attention at first, and mother did the thing she always does, listened attentively without saying much herself. But Miss

Whiting kept recurring to the subject and finally I began to realize that she wanted to ask something of us. At first it occurred to me that she wanted to paint my portrait. And when she came out with it, what do you suppose it was—she wanted to do *mother*. I was never so surprised in my life—in fact you could have knocked me down with a feather. Of course I know that my mother is a peach, but I wouldn't think an artist would see it—somehow I would expect an artist to want to paint somebody with more *color*, if you know what I mean. Well, mother was as embarrassed as she could be. But Miss Whiting was just lovely. She said that mother need not come to the studio at all—she'd come to the house—and only when it was perfectly convenient. At first mother wouldn't hear of it. But Miss Whiting kept at it, and of course I played her game as hard as ever I could. Finally mother said yes. And then, without warning, mother remarked that when she was a young girl a whole lot of artists came to North Campion one summer and every one of them painted a picture of her. Now isn't that the limit! Mother Martin never mentioned a word of that to me before. I guess if anybody wanted to paint *my* picture I'd have it put in the paper. Well, that night I told Tug about the studio-plan. It didn't seem to make any hit with him at all. He said it was all right for a girl-artist living alone, but when it came to a married couple—why, they must think of the future and three rooms were altogether too few. Of course when Tug put it that way to

me, I saw that the bungalow was entirely out of the question. Sometimes I think I'm not so practical as I might be. And of course it isn't as if I could get any help from Tug. Tug knows what he *doesn't* want; but he isn't what I call *creative*. I feel more at sea than ever. I keep taking out bound copies of the magazines from the library, but they only seem to stir me up without getting me anywhere. When I'm out walking or motoring, I look at nothing but houses. It's queer what you *don't take in* about architecture until you begin to think of building yourself. Sometimes I almost think we'd better give the whole thing over to Jake Pebworth, and let him do the best he can for us. But somehow that seems so sort of *soulless* and *mechanical*—if you know what I mean. It's like putting a nickel in the slot and taking any house that comes. I want my house to represent my personality. But I'm sure I don't know what my personality is. Sometimes I feel quite discouraged—or would if mother wasn't always pointing out that it isn't anything that I have to hurry about.

January 22.

Yesterday mother and I went to tea with Mrs. Hollet and Miss Ralph. Oh, I'm so glad that I went, for all my ideas changed completely. I feel so much better now. I really think I see light ahead. There were only five of us at the tea—our hostesses, Jake Pebworth, mother, and me. Their house is one of those tiny slant-roofed farmhouses that you



see all over New England. I have always thought it very little and old-fashioned and inconspicuous and out-of-date. At least that's the effect on the outside. But my goodness, what a difference on the inside! You enter a little square hall. There are small rooms on either side, a big living-room in the back and leading off from it so many rooms that I really got mixed up. When we got into the living-room, the strangest thing happened. Mother Martin gave one look about and then the tears came right straight into her eyes. I didn't know what was going to happen. But mother said right off that they mustn't think she was going to cry, because she wasn't. She said the house and its furnishings reminded her so much of the way the house looked in North Campion when she was a girl that it fairly made her homesick. Then she wiped her eyes, smiled, and Mrs. Hollet said: "Then I know you'll be interested to see what we've collected in the way of old furniture." They took us all over the house. Well, that was when I got my first shock. For, like Miss Whiting, their furniture was all old mahogany, much of it the spit of Aunt Mary's. And it seems that they *prefer* it to anything else, that they spend all their time and most of their money hunting up old stuff, that they furnish up houses for people with it. It seems it's the thing nowadays to have colonial furniture and that it brings fabulous prices. Aunt Mary's six-legged highboy, for instance—they said they could sell it for us for over two hundred dollars if we wanted to part with it—in fact they said every-

thing of Aunt Mary's was exceptionally beautiful, interesting, and *hence*, valuable.

Well, if I wasn't the surprised person. I knew, of course, that most people cling to heirlooms; but I supposed that was mainly sentiment. And of course I'd heard of people buying antiques, but I thought that was because they had the collecting bug. I went around like a girl in a dream and just gawked at things—shelves filled with old china like what Mrs. Ventry used to collect, shelves with old pewter, old glass, candlesticks, a warming-pan, trays—I don't think I could begin to enumerate them—and listened to the infinitesimal prices they had paid for them at country auctions.

Later Mr. Pebworth came. Mrs. Hollet and Miss Ralph were getting the tea ready and they asked me if I would show him a pie-crust table that they had just fixed up. It was in another room, and after we got there alone I just took my courage in my hand and I said:

"Mr. Pebworth, I don't know what you will think of me for what I'm going to say. But I'm a very ignorant girl very much in need of advice. And I'm going to ask you to help me." He looked as *surprised*, but he stopped jumping about and came and sat down beside me. I said, "Tug and I, as you know, have this money to buy a house, and it's all up to me to choose it. I can have anything in the world that five thousand dollars will buy. But I don't know what I want. I don't even know what I ought to want. For instance, it is a very great sur-

prise to me to find out that Aunt Mary's old furniture is so valuable. But it's a greater surprise to find that it is beautiful. I can't see it—I honestly can't. I prefer modern things—for they seem so much more light and clean and convenient and smart. But I don't want to make any mistakes and I *do* want to buy things that are permanent. And if old things are better I want to get them. But I want to know why."

Well, you never saw anybody so sweet and kind and sympathetic as he was. He gave me the nicest and clearest and most interesting talk I ever listened to. He began by saying that my state was enviable because, unlike most people, I knew enough to know that I didn't know anything. Then he took up the house subject. He gave me a little lecture on architecture and he told me just what was wrong with the houses that I had looked at in Maywood. He ended by saying, "Why, Miss Martin, you're living now in a house that is a model of taste. I'll be frank with you and tell you that, from my point of view, the point of view of anybody with a cultivated taste, you ruined it by putting that new paper on and buying all that modern furniture. I cannot bear to think of that splendid mahogany rusting in the barn—it must have been wonderful in those fine, noble big rooms." That brought him to the subject of furniture. He said that the love of old things was often a slow growth, the result of careful study and careful observation. Much of our enjoyment came simply because they were old and adapted them-

selves to the simpler needs of a simpler time. Another reason that we love them is that they are hand-made and have all the engaging little irregularities of hand work. But the thing that makes them most desirable, after all, aside from their usefulness, is that they are really more beautiful—the lines are more simple, graceful, dignified. There was a lot more that I don't remember. But he ended by giving me a list of books on old furniture. He said, "If you really want to understand the colonial type, read and study these books. Every time you have a chance to look at old furniture study it carefully. Go out into your barn and look at your Aunt Mary's stuff every day for a month and see if at the end you don't understand."

We had an awfully good time at tea—but I guess I never was so silent and absent in company in my life; for all the time I was looking about me and thinking very hard of what Mr. Pebworth said. And then, I was troubled, too, for though I could see that that house was wonderfully consistent, it truly and honestly gave me an uncomfortable feeling. I couldn't analyze it enough to realize what it was. But on the way home, mother said something that hit the nail right on the head. I asked her what she thought of it, and she said, "Well, I loved to see all those old things because they brought back my girlhood. But after a while I had a queer feeling about them. It seemed so wrong for them to be on shelves. We *used* our old things—we didn't, as you might say, make a *collection* of them. I felt

as if I was in a museum looking at things in glass cases." That was exactly the way I felt. And I suppose that's the way Tug felt about Callie Hunt's house. On the whole, I guess a house isn't a home if you make an exhibition-hall of it, whether it's cut-glass and painted china like Callie's or old pewter and silver like Miss Ralph's. It is certainly very puzzling.

February 23.

The night I came home from tea with Mrs. Hollet and Miss Ralph I told Tug that I wasn't going to think of the house for a whole month. I was going to put every plan and idea that I'd had out of my head and see what leaving it alone would do. Mother says a watched pot never boils, and I guess I had too many ideas for my own good. Anyway, I decided to put the pot on the back of the stove and let it simmer. And I've done that thing. In the meantime, I've got hold of every book on old furniture that I could beg, borrow, or steal and I've read them from beginning to end and from end to beginning. I don't know how it came about—perhaps it was the fact that I have thought of nothing else—but I've got sort of—*obsessed* (I guess that's the word) with old things. You can't read of the care and thought and interest and love with which they were made without coming to have a sort of tenderness for them. Some of the chairs and crickets are such darlings. Even the kitchen

things—I'm simply mad about those old pots and skillets!

To-day I had a long talk with mother. I told her how I had changed my opinion about Aunt Mary's mahogany, and if she would let me use some of it in my house after I was married I would take the most precious care of it. I told mother quite frankly that, if I were she, I'd get rid of all the modern stuff that's in our house now and have Aunt Mary's furniture done over and put right back in the places where they used to stand. I told mother that, now when I looked back on it, it seemed to me I had influenced her and father *unduly* in getting the new stuff. You should have heard mother laugh. She said that getting that new furniture was all her idea (though later I noticed when we talked it over with father he said it was all his idea). Mother said that she was glad, however, that I had grown to love Aunt Mary's things because she'd always had a guilty feeling about their being out in the barn. She said I could have them *all* and welcome. But I said I should only take half, because half really belonged to Ern. Mother wrote Ern and asked him if he wanted half, and he said, no, he hated the darned old truck. But just the same I shall divide them with the utmost care. For if Ern Martin doesn't know enough to appreciate those beautiful things, his wife will, and I'm not going to have her say that I hogged all the family heirlooms.

But I am just as much at sea in regard to the house.

February 27.

I am going to tell just what happened to-day in the order in which it happened.

When Tug and I went out for a walk this afternoon, we met Lila Ellis. She stopped and asked us how the house was coming on. Of course I had to say that I hadn't made up my mind yet. Then she asked us if we wouldn't come home with her and talk it over. I went—well, I must confess, mainly because I didn't know how to say *no*. She was wheeling the baby. But after we turned round, Tug took it out of her hands in the most natural way in the world. It was the strangest thing to see Tug pushing that baby-carriage. Tug is such a dear. I don't suppose Ern Martin or Tom Deane or Fred Partland would be caught dead doing such a thing. But Tug was as unconcerned and unconscious, making jokes every step of the way. When we got to the door, he lifted little Molly up and carried her into the house as naturally as if he'd taken care of babies all his life.

Well, the moment I stepped into Lila Ellis's house I *loved* it. We walked straight into a great big living-room flooded with sunlight. There was a huge fireplace at one end that ran to the very ceiling, made of old Delft tiles with funny Biblical pictures and inscriptions on them. The room was very simply, almost scantily furnished with a few old pieces that were quite as good as Aunt Mary's. The furniture certainly looked as if it had been used. But I mustn't waste time talking about the

house; for, in front of the fire, sat three of the most beautiful children I have ever laid my eyes on. The oldest boy is Ralph, brown-haired and gray-eyed, slender, aristocratic-looking—he might be a *prince of the blood*. Then comes Marcia, a perfect little angel-blond—curls tumbling off her head by the hundreds—Lila says it's all she can *do* to get a comb through them. Then comes Gideon, who's black-haired and black-eyed—the football type, a perfectly *corking*-looking child, and Molly the baby, who's red-headed, pink-cheeked, and covered with dimples. I never saw such children. They looked as if they'd never had a sick day in their lives. And when Lila took off that mangy fur coat and revealed a little house-dress of dark gingham, her hair, gray as it was, floating like a soft cloud above her forehead and that pinky color in her face which comes from being out-of-doors so much with the baby—why she looked like a madonna.

After a while Lila told the children, who were tumbling all over Tug, that they must take care of the baby while she served tea. And if you will believe it those children sat down and played with Molly—obedient as trained animals. After we had tea, Lila took us all through the house.

I never saw a house *like* it—Tug was wild about it. It seems that it was an old broken-down place to begin with. Lila said, "My father gave me three thousand dollars and all my mother's furniture for a wedding-gift. I could have had a new house with that money, but oh, it would have been



so little and cramped. Then Ralph and I happened to see this and I decided to buy it—I would be ashamed to tell you what we paid for it—and put the rest of the money into good plumbing and modern conveniences.”

I can't go into everything, but there was a bathroom that was a *perfect wonder* and a kitchen with so many modern conveniences that it seemed as if all you had to do was to touch a button and the house cleaned itself. But I *must* describe the nursery—the great big room that was formerly the attic. It was papered with Mother Goose paper, all the books and toys on shelves and in closets and made just right for children to sleep and play in. It was the most lovely child's room I ever saw. Lila had a kitchenette put in right beside it, with an electric stove and a refrigerator. She never has to go downstairs for anything that the children need. She says I can't possibly have any idea the steps that alone has saved her—especially at night and in case of illness.

After a while we came downstairs and Tug had a frolic with the babies. It was a revelation to me. I hadn't any idea Tug was so fond of children. Children always come to me, but I don't consider that I'm much of a hand with them, but Tug is a *perfect wizard*. He got right down on the floor, notwithstanding he was wearing a new suit, and they climbed all over him.

After a while Tug had to leave. Then Lila and I had a long talk.

I guess I've got to revise every idea I ever had of Lila Ellis; for, after that talk, there's nobody in this town I admire more. She told me something about her life before she was married. It was far from a bed of roses. To think how I used to envy her! Her mother died when she was a little girl. She grew up just adoring her father and her brother Tom. But first her brother married a woman who became very jealous of her, then her father did. "It seems incredible what things women can do *to* men and *with* them, Phoebe," she said, "but after a while those women managed to alienate my father and brother from me, although I tried to steer as tactful a course as I could. I haven't seen Tom for five years now, and after my father had been married two years, he proposed that I should go somewhere to board. Oh, what a miserable time I had until I married Ralph! Nobody knows what an unhappy thing I was; for I never told anybody. I made up my mind after I was married that I was going to surround myself with *love*—the *only kind of love that never fails*. And, oh, I've been so happy with my children. I haven't half enough. I want to have a little brood round me. Molly's beginning to walk now and already I feel as if I must have a *little* baby in the house. Of course I've given up my life to them. People don't hesitate to intimate to me that I'm pursuing a very foolish course. They tell me I'm falling behind the times; and it is true that I don't get much chance to read. They don't hesitate to tell me that I'm losing my

looks—as if my mirror would conceal that fact from me. But I can't seem to care about my looks—Marcia and Molly have all the beauty we need in this family. They are always holding up Callie Hunt—I think Callie Hunt's house is a horror. I'm a perfectly happy woman. I wouldn't change with anybody. People do give me credit for one thing, though. They say that I have the best children in town. But they're good because I keep at the job of making them good. People say I have wonderful discipline, but I have to give all my time and energy to maintaining that discipline. I can't let up for a moment. Best of all, we're all well—the children and Ralph and I. I lay half our good health to the roominess and convenience of this house."

I walked home alone. On the way, I passed the old Durland house, and the idea came to me that I would like to see the inside. I didn't have a key, but I climbed in through a window at the back.

It was the most beautiful old place I ever was in—except my own home—spacious and dignified but simple and quaint too. Downstairs there's a long room on one side of the lovely big hall and two rooms on the other. Upstairs there are four chambers and a great garret that would make a lovely nursery. There are fireplaces in all the rooms. And then the details of it are so fascinating—the woodwork, the paneling, the doors and windows, and the quaint, queer closets everywhere. Somehow an old house is such a *friendly* place. I

sat on the fine old stairway for a long time, planning where I would put Aunt Mary's things if it belonged to me. I was thinking what had probably happened there—births and deaths and weddings and funerals and dances and theatricals—when suddenly I remembered something that old Mrs. Sawyer told me once. When she was a girl, the Durlands themselves lived there. Mr. and Mrs. Durland were blonde and they had eight beautiful children—just like a flight of stairs for size—all blonde, too. Mrs. Sawyer said that everybody used to call them “the angels.” She said the girls grew up perfect beauties, and one of them, Esther Durland, married a very distinguished Englishman—he was Prime Minister or something. I tried to imagine those eight little fairy beings tumbling up and down those stairs. Well, perhaps——

After dinner I told Tug that I would rather buy the old Durland house than build a new one. To my great surprise, Tug was perfectly delighted. He said that pleased him more than anything I could do. And he told me something he never told me before. He said that all his life, *our* house has been his ideal of a *home*. He said that he will never forget as long as he lives what fun he used to have rainy days in the Playroom when all the children in the neighborhood were gathered there. He says that, in some ways, it seems more like a home to him than his own house. He said that Callie Hunt's house wasn't a home at all, because there was too much *system* in it, and that Miss Ralph's place wasn't

a home because there was too much *art*; but that Lila's house was a real home because it was all *heart*. What beautiful ideas Tug has! I wonder I didn't consult him in the first place.

THE END OF THE HOUSE BOOK

## CHAPTER VIII

### I, PHOEBE, TAKE THEE, TOLAND

**E**ARLY as it was that blue-and-gold October morning, the house quivered and hummed and rocked with suppressed excitement. A medley of sounds filtered through it and Mr. Martin lay for a while listening to them. Finally he arose. He bathed, shaved and dressed with a leisureliness that had an effect of premeditated delay. When he left the room, the domestic excitement had grown rather than diminished. But it did not seem to affect Mr. Martin. Halfway down the long hall, he even paused for a moment.

The door of Phoebe's room was open. Its whole length and breadth—the polished, rugless floor, the expanse of rose-garlanded wall-paper—lay revealed in the brilliant sunlight. Dismantled, her little bed presented only a stark white framework to her father's eye. Her dressing-case—it was her whim to have it so low that she must sit to it—was bare of its silver accessories. The table glared, the writing-desk gaped, the bookcase yawned empty. In one corner stood a trunk, a box of books, a box of bric-à-brac, a pile of pictures, everything carefully wrapped in tissue-paper. Near was a tiny wooden chair, rope-seated.

Mr. Martin went slowly down the front stairs. The dining-room was deserted. Not alone deserted, it looked empty; for much of the furniture had been moved out. An orange lay on a plate at Mr. Martin's place, the skin cut petal-wise and turned away from the fruit in the fashion that only Phoebe's fingers had the patience to follow. The door-bell rang presently and the excitement in the house flashed to a flame. As he ate, Mr. Martin listened to it all. Came to him the sound of heavy, alien feet, of gruff, alien, masculine accents, questioning; came Mrs. Martin's voice suggesting, Phoebe's entreating, Ernest's commanding. But Mr. Martin made no move. He did not even look out the window.

"Why, how long have you been up, Edward?" Mrs. Martin said, appearing suddenly in the doorway. "I didn't hear you stir. And how tired you look! I shouldn't think you'd closed your eyes. Isn't this a beautiful day? So warm—and it looked so much like rain last night. Happy the bride the sun—— Just think, Edward, the expressmen never came for the furniture in Phoebe's room until this moment, although they promised they'd be here last night and we waited for them until nearly eleven o'clock. Why is it that people have no honor about such things? Phoebe's been so worried for fear they wouldn't come at all. She would get up, although I did my best to make her stay in bed. It was all I could do to keep her from going down to the house to see that the furniture was put in the

right places. I told her it would be perfectly *indecent* for her to appear out to-day. Finally, Ernie said he'd ride down with the load. Phoebe drew up a plan where everything was to go and she made Ernie promise he'd mop up after the expressmen—she's crazy for fear they'll track her lovely floors all up. Her heart's set on having that house as neat as a pin when they come back to it. I never saw such a particular child. If she thinks she's going to do all her housekeeping on that scale—— But it certainly does look lovely. It does seem strange, Edward, that you've shown so little curiosity about it. Why, you haven't been down there since—— If I was Phoebe, I wouldn't know what to make of it. When are you coming out?"

"About four, I guess," Mr. Martin said.

"I don't believe there's any need of your going into the office," Mrs. Martin observed with disapproval. "I guess they could get along one day without you. What would they do if you broke your leg? We'll have dinner at noon—a steak—that's so easy to cook. And, to-night, we'll have a picked-up supper—for we'll all have to eat again at ten. Yes, Mary," she interrupted herself to address the sullen-looking girl who had appeared in the doorway, "that's right! Clear everything right away!" She paused until Mary had left the room. Then, "Edward," her voice lowered to panic-stricken sibilance, "Mary's in one of her tempers to-day. I'm just handling her with gloves. I'm so afraid that she'll go and leave me in the



lurch that I don't know what to do. There, there's the door-bell again!" Mrs. Martin vanished.

"It was Bradley," she exclaimed, returning after a colloquy at the door. "He's delivered the chrysanthemums. He promised Phoebe solemnly that he wouldn't get them here before three this afternoon—and here they are at half-past seven. Isn't it strange how little honor people have about such things? But the man said they were all fixed in damp paper so they couldn't possibly wilt. Phoebe's attending to them herself, although I begged her to let me. If she'd only lie down or just sit down and read. She said she couldn't read if her life depended on it. What time did you say you'd get out?"

"About four," Mr. Martin answered.

"There, there's the telephone!" Mrs. Martin vanished. "I'll answer it, Phoebe," she called. "Hello! Hello! Oh, good-morning, Molly! Yes. I *think* so. But I'll have to ask Phoebe. Phoebe! It's Molly Tate. She says she's just stepped into Bradley's to see the bridesmaids' baskets and she's quite sure they're using the kind you didn't like."

Mrs. Martin re-entered the room. From the hall came Phoebe's voice. "Hello, Molly! *No!* Well, of all incredible stupidity! Certainly—the *gold* ones—they're shaped like darling old-fashioned poke-bonnets. Oh, you're a dear, Molly. Thank you." Mr. Martin heard the click as Phoebe hung up. Then the bell rang again. "Hello! Hello! Oh, *Tug!* Good-morning. Many happy returns of

the day! No. No. Certainly not! I don't know why, but mother says you can't come over here today. It would be a fierce breach of etiquette. What nonsense. *Everybody* would see you. Tug Warburton, if you come over here, I shan't marry you." Again Mr. Martin heard the determined snap with which Phoebe hung up.

"Aren't you going to eat any more breakfast than that, Edward?" Mrs. Martin went on. "You'll be faint by ten. But I'll have a good dinner this noon. Steak—that's always so easy to—What time did you say you'd get out? Oh, yes, I remember—four. I'll lay all your things on your bed and have the water drawn for your bath. There, there's the telephone again." Mrs. Martin vanished.

"It's Madame Lily, Phoebe," she called in another instant. "She wants to know if she can come an hour later. You'd better come down and talk with her yourself."

"All right," Phoebe's voice floated down from the heights. Followed the soft swift patter of her downstairs progress. Then, "Good-morning, Madame Lily. Yes, later will do just as well. In fact, I prefer it. No, I prefer to do my own hair. But I want massage and my hands manicured. And of course you're to do mother's hair. Mother, you'd better have a facial massage, hadn't you?"

"Well, I don't know," came Mrs. Martin's most uncertain accents.

"You've simply got to, mother. It'll set you up

so, besides making you look so swell. All right, Lily, darling. Half-past four—and mother'll have facial beside."

"I'm glad we've got that matter settled," Mrs. Martin explained, reappearing in the dining-room. "Madame Lily had another wedding in Rosedale and there was some difficulty about the hours. At first it looked as if we wouldn't get her at all. But Phoebe's heart was set on having Lily—she's so much nicer than anybody else. Beside——"

"Good-morning, father-in-law elect," Phoebe greeted her father buoyantly from the door.

"Good-morning, bride," Mr. Martin responded in kind.

Phoebe's manner had its best touch of cheer and she stopped to imprint on the top of her father's head a kiss that was deliberately airy. Then she wound her blue kimono about her, curled up in the big chair, and sat kicking one slipper off and on. "I've been up since five o'clock," she explained, "and, already, I feel as if it were to-morrow. I lay awake half the night worrying. I'm convinced that Tug will forget the ring and the license and the check for Mr. Cameron. I'm absolutely certain that Ada Warburton will be late—she's never been *known* to be on time for anything. I'm perfectly dead sure that the carriage won't call for us at all. And I know just as well as I know my name that I shall forget to take my carriage shoes off. Now just imagine traipsing up the aisle in those red felt things with the black fur tops. I woke

up at five this morning in a cold perspiration with the conviction that my gloves wouldn't fit. And *up I got* at that hour and tried them on. Of course it was all off about sleeping after that."

"There, that reminds me," exclaimed Mrs. Martin, "I must slit up the ring-finger of your glove. I'll do that now while I think of it. Now, where are my scissors?"

"Well, father," said Phoebe, still deliberately gay, "what do you think of the Martin family in their famous knock-about act? Oh, and, father, that reminds me. When Mr. Cameron asks me if I'll take Tug for richer or poorer, better or worser, gooder or badder, and all that, if I stand there petrified with terror—just gawking at him—will you kindly pinch me?"

"Can't promise, Phoebe," said Mr. Martin in a tone every whit as light as hers. "I've lain awake all night trying to remember that when Cameron says, 'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?' it's up to me to do something. If I take my mind off it for a single instant I lose the combination."

"Oh," said Phoebe, "if mother was only in it she'd pull us through some way or other. Why don't they get mothers into the marriage ceremony?"

"Probably," said Mrs. Martin, pausing in arrow-flight for an instant of unaccustomed sarcasm, "because they realized that the mother would be in the doctor's hands by that time. Now, Phoebe, I

can tend to everything now. Don't you think you could go upstairs and lie down?"

"*Lie down!* Why, mother, I'd explode into a million pieces."

"Why don't you lie down yourself, Bertha?" Mr. Martin suggested. "You're running round like a hen with her head cut off."

"Lie down!" Mrs. Martin repeated. "*Lie down!* Well, if that isn't just like a man! I don't see how I'm going to get my bath in. There, there's Cousin Lora coming down the street. Thank goodness! Now when do you suppose those boys'll get here? Just think, Edward, Horrie Tate and Sig Lathrop and Red Donovan have been up ever since six o'clock cutting maple-boughs. Ernie was to join them and then come back here. I warned him to get them started just as soon as he could. One load goes to the church. Molly and Florence and Sylvia and the twins and Evelyn Warburton are there already, decorating. Good-morning, Lora; you're bright and early, aren't you?"

Cousin Lora, a little, thin, wiry, dark woman, with the snapping efficiency of a whipcord in every movement, greeted them all energetically.

Under cover of the family preoccupation, Mr. Martin quietly subtracted himself from the group.

"Oh, Lora," Mrs. Martin said in a relieved tone, "I'm so glad Edward's taking it so easy. At first I thought he'd be all broken up. Well, I don't suppose men feel these things the way women do. Now, before you lay your finger to anything, I want

you to come upstairs and see the wedding dress. Oh, Phoebe's had such a time selecting the material—she said it had got to be soft and floating. White satin she can't abide. Chiffon was too stiff—*crêpe-de-chine* even was too heavy. She found some pearl-white liberty silk that was so sheer—— It took a terribly large pattern and yet you can draw the whole thing through a ring. And her veil—I tell her it's almost too fine. She's going to have it fixed on her head just like a picture she saw in Florence. Oh, she's such a strange child—wouldn't have an orange-blossom that was more than half-budded and insisted on white orchids for her bouquet. But I must say the effect's wonderful.”

Mr. Martin walked to the station, but not with his usual brisk gait. In the train he possessed himself of a paper, but he only glanced at the headlines. In Boston he walked to his office. And now, perceptibly, he moved as if there were weights on his feet. At his desk he sat silent a moment before he opened his mail. And after he had read it, he immediately brushed it into a careless heap and fell into reverie. He sat, his eyes fixed on the office window—staring.

*That little room of Phoebe's had undergone many transformations in its brief history. At first came the birds' nests, the dried grasses, the autumn leaves, the pressed seaweeds, strings of rose-hips, the maline-bags full of milkweed seed, the various "curiosities" which in her little girlhood she had*

*collected with so much care. These were succeeded by handicraft of a more delicate and feminine order, the embroidered litter which was the result of her studies of the women's magazines, the passe-partout pictures which measured with unfailing accuracy the change in her ideas of beauty. Later came a brief attack of "hand-painting." While in its throes, she painted a white china desk-set with forget-me-nots and a yellow china desk-set with violets. Later, of course, she rejected this for silver. There followed on this, impedimenta of a more tender nature—the sentimental souvenirs of vacations, the frivolous filigree of Germans. Last of all the little room blossomed with the exotic loot of her trip abroad. Mr. Martin had watched it with amusement and with interest. Much of the detail had sunk out of his memory, but the girl-development which it indicated stuck fast. He could have written the history of Phoebe's decorative instinct; for she had never made one of these sweeping changes without telling him all about it first.*

"Why, Edward," Mrs. Martin said, an hour later, "I thought you weren't coming back until four. And how tired you look! We'll have lunch in a few minutes. Why don't you go straight upstairs and lie down?"

"Oh, I'm all right," Mr. Martin answered in his most offhand manner. He looked vaguely about him. The hall had an unfamiliar air. Much of the furniture had been removed and down the center

sprawled an enormous heap of maple-boughs. "There didn't seem to be much work in the office," he went on absently, "and so I thought I might as well come out. Where's Phoebe?"

"At the telephone. The child hasn't left the phone for five minutes the last hour. It's perfectly astonishing what people will do on a day when you're so busy—calling her up just to talk with her. Phoebe says it seems as if she would fly out of her skin."

"Tell her to hang up," said Mr. Martin.

"Oh, Edward, she couldn't do *that*. And then so many people have been lovely. Yellow flowers have been coming all the morning. Mrs. Sawyer brought over a great bunch of those tiny yellow asters that she always raises and old Mr. Wilde has just left a wheelbarrow full of yellow dahlias."

She was interrupted by the crescendo peal of Phoebe's blithe laughter, her impetuous rush in their direction. "Oh, mother, it's Tug. He's *still* asking if he can't call this afternoon. He says he's decided that, as long as it's a yellow wedding, the ushers had better wear sunflowers. Then he says at the reception they can do a song-and-dance. Why, Father Martin—you darling angel—when did you come back?"

Mr. Martin made a pretense of eluding her, but in the end he submitted to his daughter's bear-hug.

"Father, there's the peachiest little old Chippendale mirror just come from Sylvia. Come right upstairs this moment and see it."



"Oh, no, he can't go upstairs yet," Mrs. Martin protested. "Come into the library, Edward. I want you to see what Lora's done."

The library looked doubly alien to Mr. Martin. Here, again, much of the furniture had been removed. Maple-boughs made golden Gothic arches over all the windows and doors. Cousin Lora was perched on one stepladder at the right of the folding-doors and Ernest was perched on another at the left.

"Hullo, father," said Ernest, hammering violently. "There, that's the third time I've upset those damn—excuse me, Cousin Lora—tacks. I hereby register a vow never to get married as long as I live. It's a career in itself. Isn't Cousin Lora a bird, father? Talk about your hanging-gardens of Babylon! Say, Cousin Lora, that's great. See, I'm leaving all this string here to tie the chrysanthemums in. Now I'll beat it down town in the machine and get some more twine and tacks and do those errands for mother, and, say, Phoebe, what was that you wanted at the caterer's?"

"Tell him I've decided to have the bouillon *cold*—now it's turned out to be such a lovely warm day. And tell him that I'd like to know what's the matter down there. I've been trying to get him on the phone all morning. Now, father!"

Obedient as ever to that voice, Mr. Martin climbed three flights of stairs to the Playroom. He wandered from table to table, staring fixedly at anything that met his eye. Phoebe watched him an instant. "Of course, father, I'm not going to have



Talk about your hanging-gardens of Babylon !



anything so vulgar as a display of wedding-gifts," she started off at almost a normal pace. "I just put them up here so that one or two of the girls could sneak off and see them. Look at that table just covered with cut-glass. There are eight salad-bowls. Oh, and, father, there's Sylvia's gift—it's the ninth looking-glass. Well, I've got a line on my friends' opinion of me. I guess they all think I'm the vainest thing that ever happened. And bully for them! I've doped out a series of mirrors in my room by which I can see my back hair, the hang of my skirt, and my waist-line all at one and the same time."

For a moment Phoebe almost ran down. But she pulled herself together and loosed another installment of chatter. Only, always, her misty eyes, stealing to her father's face and then leaping away, seemed to try to say the things that her lips repudiated.

"What am I going to do with all those clocks? I hate to think of exchanging wedding-gifts—it seems so *unappreciative* and *calculating*; but ten is really too many. And, father, wasn't it lovely of Mrs. Raikes to send me that lovely copy of Botticelli's 'Spring'? I guess she remembered I told her once she was the spit of it. And, father darling, I feel as if I'd never really thanked you for the silver. It's just perfectly beautiful. If I'd ever thought—— There's the lunch-bell. Come right down, father. For I'm so hungry it seems as if I'd faint and I'm afraid mother will—— There's the

telephone. Mother, please answer it, and if it's Tug, tell him he *cannot* come over to see me. Mother, you must lie down after dinner or you'll certainly go to pieces."

But Mrs. Martin did not lie down. They all dawdled unaccountably at the table, held by Mr. Martin's extraordinary flow of spirits. Mr. Martin, it seems, had snatched a bite in Boston. He talked while the others ate, talked while the others laughed, talked until——

"Well, what are we thinking of?" Mrs. Martin asked in a panicky tone. "Has it occurred to any of you that there's a wedding in this family at eight o'clock to-night? Oh, I'm so glad," she said, accompanying Cousin Lora to the library, "that Edward's so happy. I'd expected he'd be awfully blue to-day. Well, Lora, there's no use in talking, a father doesn't feel these things the way a mother does."

In the afternoon the work grew a little more silent, a little more concentrated. Mrs. Martin shuttled from room to room, performing a hundred disconnected tasks. Cousin Lora and Ernest returned to their work with the maple-boughs. Parlor, library, and hall were finished. Now they were working on the dining-room. Phoebe had brought the great florist boxes up from the cellar. She was filling vases and jardinières with chrysanthemums. The great, shock-headed blossoms emerged, as prophesied, miraculously dewy and fresh, the satiny petals firm and close. Mr. Martin, constituting

himself doorman and telephone-boy, brought to Phoebe a succession of express-packages, called her to this and that peremptory message on the telephone.

Into all this absorption suddenly burst Flora. "Miss Phoebe, dey's a tramp in the kitching won't go way, nohow Ah talks to him. Kase he says he wanster see the bride."

"A tramp!" ejaculated Phoebe. "To see me! *For goodness' sake!* I never heard of such a thing! Well, of course I can't see him. Yes, I will, too. I won't refuse *any* request on my wedding-day. Gracious, doesn't it sound mysterious and romantic?"

Her father listened to her footsteps for a perturbed instant before it occurred to him to follow. From the hall he heard her civil, "Good-afternoon, is there anything I can do—— Oh, Tug Warburton, you ridiculous——" Then the peals of her rippling mirth.

Tug wore a disguise so complicated that it should have caused his immediate arrest in any well-governed city. His statement that his make-up had taken an hour gained instant credence. Of the details a black eye and a painful bruise on his cheek were perhaps the most noticeable.

"Go home at once," Phoebe said severely after she had stopped laughing. "It's *something dreadful* your being here. I don't know *why* it is, but it is! Mother'll probably call the wedding off, and I shan't blame her. I never felt so embarrassed in

my life. I don't know *why*, but I do. There, there's Madame Lily. I've got to go now. Father, will you kindly order my future husband to leave this house?"

"Sit down, dad-in-law," said Tug comfortably after Phoebe had left, "and have a smoke." He reached into a sagging pocket for pipes, matches, and tobacco. "Isn't this hell? I give you my word of honor if I come out of it alive I shall never get married again as long as I live. I don't suppose, though, you're any more comfortable than I."

"I suppose there never was a man yet who didn't just naturally hate a wedding," said Mr. Martin. "No, I can't say that I'm exactly comfortable."

"Lord, it must be fierce for you," Tug admitted. "Just think of giving up a girl like Phoebe. I don't know exactly what that means."

Mr. Martin smiled. "I reckon you don't, Tug," he agreed genially. He stopped as if he were not going to speak again and there was an interval of silence, disturbed only by twin puffs. Then Mr. Martin broke it. His words seemed to come with an effort. "I guess you don't, Tug," he repeated, "I guess you don't. And you won't know until you come to give your own daughter away. It isn't exactly that you—— It's more that you—— This is what I mean. I guess every man has done some things in the course of his life that he doesn't like to look back on."

He stopped. Tug gave a quick, confirming, understanding nod.

"I suppose I haven't done any more than the next fellow," Mr. Martin went on lightly, "and I've always said to myself that I was ready to stand the gaff. I meant of course that I was ready to stand it myself. But——" Mr. Martin broke off, smiling again. "What I'm saying now is that if the Fates—or whatever you call those fellows who control human destiny—hit me through Phoebe——" Mr. Martin paused. "Well, I guess I'm ready to renege. Now, you Tug, you remember that!"

Mr. Martin's tone was still jocular, but by this time his smile had grown a little fixed. Tug's answering, "Sure, dad-in-law, I'll remember that," smoothed it out again. Tug's tone had quite the right ring of practicality, the frank, everyday acceptance of an obvious, everyday situation.

When Tug left, the tension of the house tightened. From upstairs, Mrs. Martin, helplessly coiled in hot towels by Madame Lily's skilful hands, was calling down smothered advice, admonition, suggestion. Cousin Lora was bowing the yellow ribbons that tied bunches of asters and dahlias among the flaming maple leaves. Phoebe was still fussing with the chrysanthemums, turning a flower-head here, cutting a leaf there, moving vases yonder. Flora and Mary were cleaning the litter from the hall and dining-room. Ernest was going over the library floor with a carpet-sweeper. A little later, Phoebe slipped upstairs, then Lora, then Ernest. Every faucet in the house seemed to be running. Dusk came, the lights flared, and suddenly Flora was



breaking Mr. Martin's lonely vigil with the bell. It was dinner, and the three women—all in kimonos, and Mrs. Martin with an unaccustomed elegance of coiffure—were filing down the stairs.

After their short supper the tension changed to fever-heat excitement. The bell rang. Madame Riley appeared. The women disappeared upstairs. Ernest and his father bathed and dressed. Ernest embarked on his last errand in the auto. Mr. Martin lingered in his room. Cries of admiration came to him from the spare chamber. "Oh, I like that," in Cousin Lora's voice. "I think it is perfectly beautiful," in Mrs. Martin's voice. Curiously enough, her tone had Phoebe's note of soaring enthusiasm. Then, "Just a little fuller there, Madame Riley," in Phoebe's voice.

Mr. Martin wandered downstairs into the library—into the stark yellow-and-cherry glare of the maple-boughs. He wandered absently about for a moment. Then he went to the window and stood gazing outside. His look fixed on something there.

*Mr. Martin had given Phoebe all the furniture in that little room. On her birthday, Phoebe always went into Boston to lunch with him at the Touraine. Afterwards they would pick out the birthday gift together. One year, it was the fragile little oak desk. The next, it was the little oak dressing-table; Phoebe had chosen that particular one because the mirror was shaped like a heart. Next it was the bookcase in which the green-and-*

*gold Alcott books still held the most honored place. Ten or twelve years they had been doing this: from the time when Phoebe was a long-legged, big-eyed, frisking colt of a thing, until suddenly she curved and colored into a blooming creature whose vivacity arrested every passing glance. It seemed only a year or two—and now——*

From upstairs came staccato cries, came rustlings, silken, satiny, lacy. Mr. Martin went out into the hall. Into the glare of the chandelier appeared first Cousin Lora in her soft gray and creamy lace, tugging on a glove; appeared second Mrs. Martin in shimmering lilac that sparkled with silver, carefully lifting her skirt; appeared next—Phoebe.

Literally appeared—for Phoebe seemed to soar, tenuous, diaphanous, mystic, like some strange spirit of this strange day. Phoebe's face was a white blur. Phoebe's hair was a golden mist. Phoebe's gown floated a web. Phoebe's veil fluttered a gossamer. Phoebe's hands dripped cascades of snowy butterfly-shaped flowers. And, topping it all, there flared away from her curls a structure that was aureole and halo both—of star-dust, wave-spume, and dew.

Tailing the procession came Madame Riley carrying the rest of Phoebe's gown, an armful of white fire.

"I'm frightened, father dear," Phoebe said in a faint, far-away voice. "I'm afraid I'm going to break down. I feel so queer. My head whirls if I try to think. I've read the ceremony over and over

again, and yet I can't remember anything about it now."

Mr. Martin patted the little, damp, trembling hand. "You're all right, Phoebe," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "It will come back to you the moment you hear the first words."

"I'm afraid Tug will forget the license or the ring or the check," said Phoebe.

"I've just called Chet Damon up. He says he's just seen to them himself," said Mr. Martin.

"I'm afraid something will happen to the girls," said Phoebe.

"I've just called them up. They say that they're all right and crazy for the show to begin," said Mr. Martin.

"I'm afraid the carriage will be late," said Phoebe.

"I've just called O'Leary up. They'll be here at exactly twenty minutes to eight," said Mr. Martin.

"I'm afraid I won't remember to take my carriage-shoes off," said Phoebe.

"I'll remind you," said Mr. Martin.

"It's twenty-five minutes of," said Phoebe. "Oh, father, there's the telephone. Do you think anything has happened?"

"It's only Tug," answered Mr. Martin in an instant. "He says, 'Tell Phoebe I'm wyting at the church.' There, there's the carriage now."

At the church Cousin Lora disappeared on Ernest's arm. Mrs. Martin, whispering some last

frenzied injunctions, was borne away by Jake Peabworth. One instant they were a little deserted, terror-stricken group; the next the bridesmaids, like great white-and-yellow angels, were fluttering about them. Another chattering wait and the ushers were forming into pairs, the bridesmaids were falling into line, Sylvia Gordon had placed herself just in front, Phoebe had grasped her father's arm, and——

"Take off your carriage shoes, Phoebe," Mr. Martin said.

A crash of music came from the organ. The black and gray lines of ushers started. The white and yellow lines of bridesmaids started. Sylvia started. Phoebe started. Mr. Martin was carried on by the wave. Under the awning he went, and up the church steps and into the long alley of golden maple-boughs flaring in arches overhead, past the yellow flowers, the yellow leaves, the yellow ribbons marking pews that surged with solemn figures, straight on past Bertha's streaming face, straight on to where the altar blazed white and yellow and gold, to where Mr. Cameron stood calm, clean-cut, benign, one finger in a book, to where Tug and Chet Damon, as pale as their white violet *boutonnieres*, awaited them, straight on through the music, straight on through the silence, straight on through deep-voiced question and fluttering response, straight on to:

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

*The first thing that ever went into the little room was that tiny rope-seated chair. Mr. Martin had bought it for Phoebe himself when she was only four. He had seen it in passing at a Maywood auction, had secured it immediately. Phoebe's first Lar, it was for a long time the mostly dearly prized. It became an embarrassment in fact, for thereafter she would use no other. He could see even now the dimpled, frizzly-haired girl-thing, mouth set in parallel lines of persistence, dragging it from room to room, or with many slips and bumps, tugging it up and down stairs. He could hear her screams of rage if the strenuous Ernest dared to occupy it even for an instant. Often when he came home at night, Phoebe would be sitting in it before the fire, examining a picture-book. "Phoebe, very good girl," she would greet him at these times, an immense degree of self-approval in her manner—her mother usually disagreed with this dictum—"Phoebe, read the pitty book, all-aloney." Why, that was nearly twenty years ago. It only seemed——*

It was much gayer after that. Mrs. Martin, constantly wiping away what promised to be a never-ending stream of tears, joined them. Somehow they got home, carriage-load after carriage-load. Soon they were all in the library together, Bertha on one side of him and Phoebe on the other—the same Phoebe, although she was now Phoebe Warburton. Mr. and Mrs. Warburton were there, and Tug—the same Tug, although he was now Phoebe's

husband. Somehow, while the women were all talking and laughing at their highest speed, they were all weeping too. Phoebe's hand fumbled its way to her father's, nestled there, stayed.

Presently all Maywood was in the house. It filed past their group, saying the same things over and over again. "Well, Mrs. Warburton, you looked perfectly beautiful. Am I the first one to call you Mrs. Warburton? Your gown is simply wonderful, and as for that arrangement of the veil, it's positively the swellest thing I ever saw. Where did you get the idea?"—"Didn't the church look lovely? I couldn't hear Tug at all, but you were as clear as a bell, Mrs. Toland Warburton. Doesn't that sound *queer*, Phoebe? How original to have nothing but autumn leaves and yellow flowers! I never saw such big chrissies!"—"How lovely the bridesmaids look, Mrs. Warburton? Doesn't it seem strange to call you Mrs. Warburton? Isn't the maid of honor a beauty? What did you say her name was? Gordon? Sylvia Gordon. Those golden baskets filled with golden yellow orchids were——" —"Oh, the earrings were your gift to them, Mrs. Warburton. Just think, you're Phoebe Warburton now! Uncut amber, did you say? And I love their little gold caps!"—"How charming the house looks! Who did the decorations? Phoebe, your gown is positively eatable! Just think, Mr. Martin, she isn't Phoebe Martin any longer!"—"I never saw your mother looking so stunning!"—"What did Tug give the ushers?"—"Isn't Mrs. Warbur-

ton simply gorgeous in that green-and-gold? It's just the color of an emerald!"—"Show us your ring, Phoebe. Isn't it pretty! Well, you've lost your little daughter, Mr. Martin!"—"Well, Mrs. Phoebe Warburton, I thought your father looked as stunning as anybody, to-night. Am I the first to call you Mrs. Warburton?"

There were leagues and æons of this. Then, somehow, they were all seated at little tables. Mr. Martin did not eat anything. He said that he had had a very hearty supper.

A long eternity of this, and then everybody had stopped eating, was waiting with a curious air of expectancy. Ernest was circulating through the crowd, dispensing things from a basket. All the bridesmaids had disappeared. And—where was Phoebe?

Mr. Martin went quietly upstairs. From the spare room came a babble of girl voices that sounded every note of feminine enthusiasm. Quiet as Mr. Martin had been, he was not quiet enough. The door of the spare room flashed open, banged shut—and Phoebe was in her father's arms. She had taken off her wedding gown. Her hair hung in a feathery amber torrent to her waist. Out of the short sleeves of her combing-jacket came her little, slim, virginal arms, from its open collar came her little, slender virginal neck.

Phoebe's hands flew about her father's neck. Her head went down on his shoulder. Phoebe's

words came between great gasping breaths and great strangling sobs.

"Father, darling—I don't see—how I'm going—to leave you—it seems dreadful now it's so—near—how could I ever get married—when—you've been so good to me—and I love you—so—I hope I've been a—good daughter—to you—I can think of so many—things—that I ought not—to have done—and now—I can never make it up—never—I don't want—to leave you—I'm afraid—what shall I do—oh, father——" Phoebe's clasp tightened about her father's neck.

But Mr. Martin gently unwound her arms. "Well! well! well! *well!*" he was saying in a steady tone of jocularity. "I should think you were really going away. Instead of moving a little way down the street. Everything's all right, Phoebe. You've been a perfectly good daughter, the best I ever had. Now you run back and get into your clothes and put a little powder on your nose and—it will worry your mother."

"Oh, father!" Phoebe sobbed. "Oh, father!" and again, "Oh, father!" But she stopped and stifled her sobs. Then she pulled herself away, ran back, kissed him again, disappeared into the spare room.

Mr. Martin went downstairs. Somebody put something into his hand. He looked at it stupidly. It was a tissue-paper package of confetti. After a while, the bridesmaids came filing down. Another pause and Mrs. Martin went up to return weeping.



Another long wait and Phoebe herself came flying downstairs, slender and trim in a brown velvet suit, a great yellow chrysanthemum bobbing at her waist. She still carried the loosened bunch of her wedding-flowers, and suddenly they flew from her hands over the bannister. They were met by a shower of confetti. The Warburton limousine, which had arrived a few minutes before and had been immediately loaded with old shoes and wreathed with yellow bunting, moved down the street. A strange motor took its place in the midst of shrieks of disappointment.

Phoebe stopped to kiss her mother, stopped to kiss Ernest. But ever her tear-wet gaze went to Mr. Martin. Phoebe flew down the walk through successive clouds of confetti, and leaped into the tonneau, where Tug suddenly appeared like an apparition. But even in her flight, Phoebe's head turned over her shoulder; her look stayed with her father. Tug's hand pulled up the window in the motor-door. The engine snorted. The wheels crunched. Phoebe's white face came close to the window pane. Her eyes met her father's in a last pale, quivery smile.

Mr. Martin smiled too.

Maywood people said that Phoebe Martin's wedding was the prettiest they had ever seen—and the gayest. "And after the bridal pair had gone," they added, "you ought to have seen the way Mr. Martin took hold and just made things hum." Certainly Mr. Martin worked. He started the danc-

ing with Sylvia Gordon. He danced every dance with a different girl.

"Well, I never was so tired in my born days," said Mrs. Martin as they started upstairs long after midnight. "But it certainly has repaid all our work; for it was a beautiful wedding. Phoebe said that everything had been perfect. She whispered in my ear, father, that they were going south—she said she'd write every spare minute. Well, I suppose I'll be rested in a day or two, but it doesn't seem as if I ever could." She stopped for breath at the head of the stairs. "I never saw anything like your energy, Edward, dancing with all those girls. Why, what are you doing now, father? What *are* you doing?"

For Mr. Martin had stopped in front of Phoebe's bare, gleaming, dead, little room, had shut the door, had locked it. As he spoke, he put the key in his pocket.

"I guess I don't want to see that door standing open for one while," said Mr. Martin.

## CHAPTER IX

### ERNEST AND THE CONSPIRATORS

“**B**ELOVED Husband!”—this was Phoebe’s favorite form of apostrophe to Tug, although argumentative crises sometimes changed it to *Domestic Tyrant!* or *Household Ogre!*—“have you noticed how furiously Pauline Marr is flirting with Ern?”

“Estimable Wife!” Tug invariably answered Phoebe in kind, although argumentative crises sometimes transformed this complimentary address to *Fireside Vampire!* or *Matrimonial Encumbrance!* “I have not noticed that Pauline was flirting with Ern. But I saw at once and without the aid of a microscope the case that Frederick Wright has developed on Sylvia.”

“Oh, that’s not a case!” Phoebe waved this evidence lightly away. “Frederick’s only doing the polite thing to our guest. Pauline is rather sickening though. She’s eight years older than Ern if she’s *a day*. But then Pauline always did rob the cradle. She’s an awfully selfish, heartless thing. Do you remember the summer that Frederick and Pauline and I were staying with your mother at Marblehead how she nearly broke that poor prep. kid’s heart? I didn’t mind *that* so much, although

I didn't think it was fair. But it *makes a difference* when it's your own brother. Ern's such a cracker-jack too. Why, when Sylvia and Nancy came, he took the car way into Boston to save them that part of the trip because Sylvia wrote that Nancy was always train-sick. And when they got out here, he bought Nancy four dolls in the five-cent store—oh, the most *dreadful-looking* things. Nancy's crazy about them, of course. She's named them after the four people in the machine—only she pronounces them Thilvia and Pworline, and Fweddywick and Ernesth." Running against a blank wall in her own conversation, Phoebe reverted to her husband's lead. "It would be awfully nice if 'Fweddywick' would fall in love with Sylvia. He's going to make barrels of money sometime. It's in him. And Sylvia's always had such a dreadful struggle. She's so unselfish, too. The care of Nancy this summer is typical."

"You don't mean that she's going to have her all summer long."

"It looks that way. Marion is in a pretty dreadful condition, I gather. The other two children are boarding. There was nobody to take Nancy but Sylvia. Not that Sylvia wasn't willing and crazy to do it. She just adores Nancy. Who could help it? Isn't she a *darling* kid?"

Tug's face expanded in an agreeing grin. He was still red and flushed from a good-night frolic with Nancy. Nancy had developed the nervous strength that even quiet children display at bed-

time. Tug announced that he had broken three ribs and his collar-bone.

"I shall keep them here just as long as I can," Phoebe went on. "I shall have to think up some reason why she's helping me by staying. Sylvia's such an independent thing. Sometimes I could *shake* her. She's so afraid that she'll take the bread of charity! I've impressed it on her though that she must stay here while we go away. Just think, this is the first summer that she hasn't worked since she went to college. Oh, Sylvia is such a wonder. I always feel like a spoiled, petted, pampered *Sybarite* beside her."

"Yes, she's a bully girl," Tug said. "You know I've always been strong for Sylvia. She saw me through that time you went to New York. She was a corker. Never said a word that seemed to hint at the situation. Just kept me informed, from day to day, what you were writing. I'd do an awful lot for Sylvia. I'm glad we have a house of our own to invite her and Nancy too. You hear those words, Phoebe Warburton (née Martin). *Our own home!* Think of it!"

Phoebe swept the living-room with the veiled vagueness of her preoccupied glance. Aunt Mary's fine mahogany, the few rugs and pictures, the many books and flowers, taken with the long windows, the beautiful wainscoting, the generous fireplace, the careful restorations in the way of paint and paper, had turned the battered, tattered old Durland house into a home. Moreover, it had that precious qual-

ity—the fourth dimension of decoration—the look of use-and-wont. “I must see Jake Pebworth about that Carpaccio,” Phoebe murmured absently. “I don’t know whether to mat it or to frame it close.” Then the veil lifted. “Tug,” she went on crisply, “what’s your tip on this situation? Do you think Ern’s stuck on Pauline?”

“*Lord*, I don’t know,” said Tug. “It isn’t a thing that a man mentions naturally. All Ern talks about at present is that tramp-trip abroad that he and Sandy Williston and Art Turner are going to take next summer. I don’t believe he’s what you call in love. He wouldn’t be thinking of going abroad if he was. Why, when I began to care about you, I wanted to get to work at once, so that we’d be in a position to marry. In fact, Mrs. Toland Warburton (née Martin), I put my mother up to taking you abroad that time so that I could go West to learn the business from the ground up. Then again, Ern’s only been home two weeks.”

“Well, don’t you underrate Pauline Marr, Mr. Toland Martin (née Warburton).” Phoebe’s tone was grim, but there was a note of unwilling admiration in it. “She can do more execution in two weeks than most girls can do in two months.”

Mrs. Martin was crocheting. Mr. Martin was reading. They sat alone in the front parlor—that room which, after several years, still glared with the newness of Phoebe’s first revolution in household art.

"Edward," Mrs. Martin said, "have you noticed how Pauline is making up to Ernie?" It was three days later. Mrs. Martin was not an instant slower than her daughter in perception. In fact, if Ernest entered into the matter, she was much quicker. But just as she confided at once in Mr. Martin everything that concerned Phoebe, she kept from him at first anything that affected Ernest.

"Can't say I have," Mr. Martin replied with a strong accent of the initial indifference which he always brought to household discussion. "But I did notice what a shine Frederick took to Sylvia. He got it the moment he looked at her."

"Well, Frederick would certainly be a good match for Sylvia." Mrs. Martin considered this with the gravity which her years accorded any matrimonial proposition. "Poor child! She certainly has had a hard time! It seems to me that if I had died and Phoebe had been through such a struggle to get an education, I would never rest easy in my grave. But, Edward, I'm sort of—put-out—with Pauline for being so foolish about Ernie. Why, she must be thirty if she's a day."

"Good Lord, no, Bertha," Mr. Martin protested. "She can't be more than twenty-five or -six. And a mighty pleasant girl, I call her," he added valiantly.

The placidity of Mrs. Martin's usual expression was torn by conflicting forces. "Of course you do. Any man would. She's just about good enough for men!" she concluded with what for her was the

upper pinnacle of sarcasm. "But as for her age, I can prove it to you. She went to boarding-school with Edith Semple. Edith was only fifteen when she entered and young at that. They had four years in school together. Three years later Edith was married and Pauline was bridesmaid. Edith's been married seven years. That makes Edith twenty-nine. Then again," Mrs. Martin went on relentlessly, "Pauline and Maudie Norwall were the closest friends. They went to Europe together. Now Maudie was twenty-five when——"

Mr. Martin made a gesture of despair.

"Well, anyway, I can prove five different ways that she's thirty, and I don't want her flirting with Ernie."

"Well, mother," Mr. Martin's voice balanced perfectly between the indifference of the man who sees the mole-hill in another's mountain and the affection of the husband who wants to sympathize, "why do you let such a little thing worry you? It won't do Ernest any harm."

"Well, I declare!" There was despair in Mrs. Martin's exclamation. "Suppose he gets engaged to her."

"Ernest wouldn't be fool enough to ask a woman of thirty to marry him."

"A boy is fool enough for anything—or a man either. And you yourself just said she didn't look more than twenty-six. If she looks only twenty-six to you, you may be quite sure that she looks only eighteen to Ernie."



Mr. Martin said nothing. But the expression of his face was still that of the man who sees only the mole-hill. Mrs. Martin recognized it with an exasperated sigh. "I'm as sorry now as I can be that I ever offered to take her here. But Mrs. Warburton was in such a fix—having to leave on the instant—and we being sort of related now—and Mr. Warburton having given Phoebe that house—and I didn't want Phoebe to take Pauline and Frederick—Sylvia and Nancy are enough for her—it just seemed to me as if it was my duty. And now she's got two weeks longer here. Of course, if you haven't noticed anything, it's no use my talking to you," Mrs. Martin concluded with an audible irritation, "but I was going to ask you if Ernie had said or done anything that showed how he felt towards Pauline."

Mr. Martin now gave the matter conscientious consideration. "Why, I should say he didn't feel at all. Of course I don't see them together much."

"No, she takes him away from the house every chance she gets," Mrs. Martin interpolated.

"Well, Ernest went in on the train to Boston with Tug and me yesterday. All he talked about was that tramp-trip to Europe he wants to take with Williston and Turner. Lord, no, he's not thinking of marriage. Why, the moment I realized that I'd got to marry you or die, I went right to work. And let me tell you, I never worked so hard since, as that first year with Weldon and Clark. No, Ernest isn't in love."

The shade on Mrs. Martin's brow gave a little before a look of flattered reminiscence. She dropped the subject for a while. But by night the shade had returned.

"Why, the minute he appeared," Mrs. Martin continued, unbosoming herself to Phoebe that evening, "it was as if she got electrified—she became quite a different girl. I'd thought she was a little too dead-and-alive before. *Dead-and-alive*—I wish you could see her with Ernie when there's no company in the house. Well, she's never alone with him when I can help it. I take my sewing and sit right with them. I didn't mind it at first. It only amused me. But when Ernie began to lose his head—I don't know why I should be so surprised," Mrs. Martin went on in a mood of extreme self-disgust. "I've seen that kind of woman so many times before, I ought to know her on sight. She's one kind of woman to women, and another to men. Why, when she meets a man for the first time, she's just like a cat sensing a mouse—all ears and paws and cruel excitement."

Phoebe and her mother were sitting on the piazza of the Martin house. It was an evening in late June, pearl-soft, moon-lighted, rose-perfumed. At one end of the piazza, their backs against the up-rights of the big Gloucester hammock, Sylvia talked with Frederick Wright. Sylvia sat concealed, except where the moonlight changed the flow of her much-washed-and-faded organdie skirt to a cascade of splendor. Frederick was in full light.

They all liked Frederick Wright. The responsibilities of his hurried engineering life had made him older in flesh than they. His outdoor existence had kept him younger in spirit. His face was full of surprising contrasts. Some of his hair had gone, and what remained had turned a crisp gray. The sun had changed his skin to leather; yet his expression was that of a boy. Again, all the resolution in the world seemed to be compressed between his lips; but no one of their group laughed longer or more easily. And his eyes looked as if they could out-stare the sun; but they were quick-observing and quick-smiling.

These eyes never strayed from Sylvia's face except when Pauline and Ernest promenaded within the circle of vision.

This was often; for Ernest, at Pauline's request, had taken her for a "little stroll" in the garden immediately after dinner. An hour had passed, but they still walked. But Pauline inevitably became the focus of masculine eyes. Now as she drifted along, she seemed both to sway and to pulsate.

"Would you think she'd dare keep Ernie out there all this time, and you waiting to see him?" Mrs. Martin asked indignantly.

Phoebe did not explain to her mother that Pauline's social code proclaimed woman's first duty, the subjugation of man, woman's first responsibility, the entertainment of the unattached male; and that Pauline, with the *naïveté* of her type, took it for granted that Phoebe's code was the same as her

own. All Phoebe said was: "She certainly is one peach of a pippin!"

"If she behaved as well as she looked," Mrs. Martin said grudgingly, "she'd do very well. Not that she hasn't lovely ways when men aren't round," she added conscientiously.

Pauline had the charming, gracious manner of the finishing-off school. And she was really beautiful. At first, Phoebe and Mrs. Martin had taken a genuine delight in that beauty, a genuine interest in the methods by which it was served and conserved. Pauline always went to bed early if no evening engagement presented itself. If she stayed up late, she slept late, carefully foregoing breakfast, however; and appearing first at lunch, in order not to disturb a household limited in maids. Her care of her body was excessive and special. Systematic massage had transmuted a constitutional pastiness of skin to a delicate pallor, just tinted with rose. Systematic exercise had reduced a figure, constitutionally inclined to sumptuousness, close to the line of liteness. She was brunette, but there was a bizarre note in her coloring. Artists had told her that her hair and eyes were olive-green—a dictum which she was fond of quoting with a languid smile.

Pauline dressed with care and skill, and subtlety.

To-night, for instance, the simplicity of her marvelous gown was built on a system of complications which taxed even Phoebe's photographic observation. The principle was gauze hung over gauze—the interior background, a strange-colored Oriental

silk. Her fingers were always weighted with Oriental rings. Her shoulders always bore an Oriental scarf. Phoebe noted now with amusement that at regular intervals the scarf floated away from the graceful arms, compelling Ernest to stop and readjust it.

Ernest was an adequate companion-piece for this decorative figure; for he was at the prime and zenith of his boy-comeliness. The moonlight gleamed on his hair, as on a highly-polished steel; it was more than ever like the burnished breast-plumage of some blue-and-black bird. His eyes still held the clearness of mountain lakes. But his mouth was firm, his look steady, his tall, slender figure potential somehow of its skilled strength. He seemed none the less virile because of his white skin and his long lashes.

"I'd always hoped somehow that Ern would fall in love with Sylvia," Phoebe said, sighing.

Mrs. Martin's lips tightened. "I don't know that I think that Sylvia is any more suited to him than Pauline," she said stiffly. "I remember, Phoebe," she began again, "once when I was first married—well, you were only a few months old—a woman came to visit me from North Campion way. Etta Danvers was her name. Edward—your father—had never met her. He was away when she came, and until he returned she and I had just the nicest time together. I remember how fond she seemed of you. Pretty soon your father came home and—well, I couldn't tell you how it happened, but

the first thing I knew I was doing all the work and taking care of you, and she was sitting in the parlor in a long, lacy, ruffled—*tea-gown*, she called it—entertaining your father. I won't go so far as to say that I was *jealous*. But I certainly wasn't happy. My only comfort was"—and now a spark of feminine amusement in her eye, pointed by delicate feminine spite, kindled its fellow in Phoebe's eye—"that every night Edward would ask me how soon she was going. She bored him to death. But later that woman broke up a family in North Campion. She'd have broken up mine if Edward had been that kind of man." Mrs. Martin paused as if to collect herself.

Phoebe looked steadfastly at her mother; but her eyes grew big with a sudden soft luminosity, velvety-dark, velvety-bright. She was reflecting that, in some subtle and inexplicable way, her relations with her mother had changed entirely since her marriage. Mrs. Martin confided in her, not alone her minor troubles but all those major worries that she would never have mentioned before. It was very beautiful and very wonderful, Phoebe thought. It brought them so close together—a little as if Mrs. Martin had retraced her steps to her early wifehood, as if Phoebe had taken a bound forward to the middle years. It was not that either of them had lost anything. It was only that their relationship had been enriched. They were mother and daughter just the same; but also they were comrades and friends.

"Mother," Phoebe interrupted, "just think! Before I was married, there were some things I *perfectly hated* about matrimony. I used to get terribly discontented to think that when I was married I'd have to sit back and watch other young people going out together and getting engaged—and I wouldn't be in it myself. Sometimes that would give me an awful *back-number* feeling. But nothing's ever the way you think it's going to be, is it? Why, I feel so *superior* now. When I look at Pauline and Ern walking together there in the moonlight, they seem like shadows that haven't become *real* yet. They all, even Sylvia and Frederick, seem so inexperienced and futile and foolish. Why, I wouldn't go back for anything in *this world*."

"Yes," Mrs. Martin agreed, "that's the way I felt." Her voice dropped. At the end of the long walk, Pauline and Ernest had turned. Automatically, Pauline's scarf whirled off her shoulders like a vapor on a breeze. Automatically, Ernest's hand came up, caught it and readjusted it.

"Ernest hasn't fumbled it yet," Phoebe whispered. "His form is perfect."

But, without a smile, Mrs. Martin reverted to the biggest question in her life for the moment. "I don't know what I'm going to do about it, Phoebe. Sometimes I make up my mind that I'll have a talk with Pauline. Then again I think I'll invent some cock-and-bull story so she'll have to leave." Mrs. Martin ended by looking dumbly at her daughter, her face again torn by irresolution.

"Oh, mother, you can't do that," Phoebe said in a shocked tone. "You must let her stay here until the steamer sails for Panama. She has no friends about Boston but the Warburtons. You can't send a young girl alone to a hotel. Mrs. Warburton would never forgive you, and I shouldn't blame her."

"Well then, what shall I do, Phoebe-child? I can't stand another two weeks of this."

For an instant Phoebe did not speak. Then all that was luminosity went out of her eyes. "Mother," she said in a low tone, "you ought to know what to do. You did it with me once. Why can't you do it with Ern?"

There was an instant of close, packed silence. From the hammock came Sylvia's throaty chuckle, from the garden Pauline's lilting laugh.

"How—what do you mean, Phoebe?" Mrs. Martin asked. But Mrs. Martin knew.

"Why, mother, you saved me from Professor Hazeltine that time by not opposing me—I mean by not forbidding him to see me or me to see him. You just let things take their course. If you hadn't, I might have eloped with him. Now, why don't you use the same tactics in Ernest's case?"

"Phoebe," said Mrs. Martin, "I *can't*. It's different with a boy. A girl's got something in her that keeps her from harm if she's any good. But I declare I don't think boys or men have. They're the most helpless things, where women are concerned, that the Lord ever made. Oh, it's terrible, it's unjust, what anxiety women are always suffering



for their men-folks. I don't think I've got the courage to keep my hands off Ernie's case."

"Mother," said Phoebe emphatically, "you've got to *find* the courage. Just try to look at this situation sensibly; as if Ern weren't your own son. Ern's pretty obstinate, you know. If he's really in love with Pauline, nothing on earth can keep him away from her. A girl's case is quite different. She can't go to see the man. But when it comes to Ern—he's of age; he's got a latch-key. He doesn't have to tell you where he's been, and you may be sure he won't, if he doesn't want to. I think you're fortunate to have it right here where you can watch it. Now I tell you what you do, mother. Instead of breaking up their tête-à-têtes, you see that Ern gets so much of Pauline that he doesn't know where he's at. Of course, Ern has a case on her. That's perfectly visible to the naked eye. But I don't think it's permanent. I haven't been married nearly a year without realizing that a woman never can pick out the girl that a man's going to admire. Oh, mother, I *wish* you could see the girls that Tug thinks are pretty. Some of them are a *perfect mess!* Just the same, though, I don't think Pauline is Ern's kind *at all*. She's too slow and mature and *indoorsy*. However, you never can tell, and the only way to find out, and to help him to find out, is to let him have plenty of her."

"But he's seeing her most of the time as it is," Mrs. Martin protested helplessly.

"Let him see her *all* the time, then," Phoebe

commanded trenchantly. "Now I tell you what we'll do, mother. We'll play Pauline's game *with* her. Don't try to separate them. Try to throw them together. Don't let any other girl get within a rod of Ern. Why, at the end of a week, he'll be simply gasping for some golf, or tennis, or croquet even. Oh, he'll be ready to fly out of his skin!"

"And Frederick?" Mrs. Martin questioned irresolutely.

"That'll leave Frederick plenty of time to see Sylvia. And if he is in love with her—and I'm beginning to think Tug has better eyes in his head than I ever gave him credit for—it will be all right. I just bet Sylvia would go *perfectly crazy* about that wild, primitive, western life of his—bossing wops and building bridges. Mother, you come right inside now and we'll plan out a campaign of lunches, dinners, whists, and other indoor sports that will keep Ern Martin glued to Pauline's side every moment for the next two weeks."

Phoebe showed a gay spirit on the walk home that night—so gay that when her voice developed a sudden note of tragedy, her companions stared at her in alarm.

"A very dreadful thing has happened to me this evening, Tug and Sylvia," she said. "My mother has been warning me of the pitfalls that lie in the path of a young married pair. She told me explicitly to beware the woman-visitor who dressed in *négligées* in order to superman the husband. I

recalled with a frightful pang that Sylvia came down to breakfast this morning in a kimono. Kindly, never, *never* appear in negligée in my house again, Sylvia, unless you wear a mackintosh over it."

Tug stared at his wife, aghast until Sylvia's throaty chuckle floated on the air like a bubble.

Later Phoebe accompanied Sylvia to her room for a good-night peep at Nancy's sprawled little figure and flushed, dimpled face. She returned to Tug, still bubbling. "Nancy'd been playing wedding with the dolls Ern gave her. But she's got her dope all wrong. She's united 'Thilvia' in the bonds of holy matrimony with 'Ernesth' and 'Pworline' with 'Freddywick.' "

Followed a furious outbreak of social engagements in the Martin family—all internecine. Setting her teeth, Mrs. Martin carried out her daughter's schedule down to the last heroic detail. She played Pauline's game better than that enterprising young lady played it herself. Did Ernest start to go anywhere in the auto, Mrs. Martin suggested that Pauline accompany him. Did Pauline make a long-deferred move toward returning neighborhood calls, Mrs. Martin insisted that Ernest take her in the machine. When they returned, Mrs. Martin always had business upstairs, leaving them tête-à-tête at the tea-table, over which Pauline presided with such histrionic grace. Mrs. Martin spent her evenings in the library, leaving the front room free. Whenever Ernest took Pauline into Boston for the

theater, he always found an enticing little supper welcoming their return.

Not easily did Mrs. Martin do this. And during the process, she was an intensely unhappy woman. Always she studied her son—studied him with an interest which increased as the days went by. But for the first time in her life, Ernest was an absolute enigma to his mother. His handsome inscrutability never emitted a gleam. “Just the look,” Phoebe translated it to herself, “of the man who is in love and trying to conceal it from his family.” He was punctilious in paying Pauline the courtesies which her position demanded. But was he growing to care less or more? Mrs. Martin could not decide. Then actual terror came upon her. For gradually, under his quiet, she felt another mood. Ernest was waiting—passionately, intensely, ferociously waiting. But for what?

Frederick arose no less energetically to the lure which Phoebe held out. He appeared at her house so often that it seemed at times as if he only slept at the Martin place. Phoebe used to say that the maid found him sitting on the steps when she got up at six. But although it was not quite that, it was almost true. Sylvia, like the docile guest she had always been (except where her self-respect was involved), lent herself in perfect obedience to Phoebe’s plan. She walked and talked with Frederick. She rode and motored with Frederick. She tennised and golfed with Frederick. She billiardied and pooled with Frederick. Just as Mrs. Martin studied

one pair of lovers, Phoebe studied the other. Phoebe felt certain of Frederick's growing absorption. But Sylvia's submission of the perfect guest developed after a while an air of languid passivity alternating with feverish vivacity—the mood of one constantly expecting something and constantly being balked.

The last night came. Early the next morning, Pauline was to board her steamer for Panama. Late the next afternoon, Frederick was to take his train for Arizona. According to schedule, Phoebe invited to dinner all the elements in her match-making and match-breaking schemes. According to schedule, they started afterwards for a walk in the Maywood Park. According to schedule, they entered the Maywood Park appropriately paired. According to schedule, Phoebe lost in the meanderings of the tiny bit of hilly land, first Ernest and Pauline, then Frederick and Sylvia. According to schedule, she and Tug immediately made a swift way home.

Phoebe called her mother up on the telephone. "All *we've* got to do, mother," she announced, "is to wait for the returns to come in. It's all settled now one way or another."

It was.

Somewhere between eleven and twelve, having seen Sylvia home, Frederick strolled back to the Martin house. Halfway, he met Ernest who, having installed Pauline safe under his mother's roof, had come out again.

"Where you going?" Frederick demanded, taking cognizance of the megaphone which Ernest carried.

"Down to Sliney's to see Red Tate," Ernest lied glibly. "I just remembered I'd promised him this megaphone. He wants it for the Maywood game to-morrow. See you later."

They passed.

Frederick continued on to the house. After going upstairs, Pauline had apparently changed her mind about retiring. When Frederick came onto the piazza, she was lying in the hammock—an Oriental houri caught in the meshes of her vapory scarf.

Sylvia had been asleep for some time; had been dreaming. Gradually a noise, tiny but recurrent, tapped its way into her dreams, maintained itself there. She awoke. Somebody was throwing pebbles at her window. She arose, threw on her kimono, drew the window gently open.

Below stood Ernest with a megaphone to his lips. "Come down, please, Sylvia," he demanded in a peremptory whisper, "I've something important I want to ask you."

Sylvia cupped her little hands into a makeshift pink megaphone. "Of course I won't come down," she hissed. "Somebody'd see me. Are you crazy, Ernest Martin? Somebody'll hear you. Go home at once!"

Sylvia's tone was equally peremptory. But her

little white face, caught between bunches of misty, moon-shot hair—most deliciously—smiled.

The megaphone went up again. "Sylvia!" Ernest's whisper was no louder, but somehow it was much more determined. "You come down here and listen to me or I'll propose to you through this megaphone! And if I once begin to tear loose—after this month that I've lived in a bottle—the whole metropolis of Maywood is going to hear it."

"I'll come down," said Sylvia.

As for Pauline and Frederick——

The next morning neither of Mrs. Martin's guests appeared at breakfast. Halfway through the morning, troubled by the tomb-like silence in the house, Mrs. Martin knocked on Pauline's door. Nobody answered. After an interval of stupefaction, Mrs. Martin opened it. The room had not been occupied. Neither, it appeared, had Frederick's. But pinned to Pauline's dresser-scarf was a letter. It read:

DEAR, DEAR LADY:

I feel somehow as if I were doing a dreadful thing to repay your hospitality by running off like this without telling you good-by and without explanation—but Frederick makes me. By the time you read this, I shall be his wife. I don't know why I am doing it except to please him, and perhaps—a little to please myself. For I really do love him. I haven't married him all these years because I was afraid. I could not think that I was the right woman

for him to take out into those strange Western scenes. But he has made me believe it, and I'm going to trust to his judgment. And somehow, dear lady, I think I'm really going to be happy. My visit here has taught me a great deal about happiness that I never guessed before. I have been dreadfully troubled. If it hadn't been for that dear lad—Ernest—I should have gone mad. By the time you read this, I shall have a different name. And so, I'm going to sign myself,

Your devoted friend and admirer,

PAULINE WRIGHT.

Phoebe and Tug were saying good-night to Nancy, who cuddled sleepily in Tug's arms. "Lord, Phoebe," said Tug, "you needn't have worried about Pauline and Ern at all. You ought to have heard the things he said about her, going in on the train this morning. All complimentary, of course, but the tone that a man takes about an estimable maiden-aunt. I never saw Ern in better spirits. Oh, by the way—he's given up all idea of that tramp-trip to Europe. He says he wants to go to work the moment he gets out of college—it can't be too soon for him."

Phoebe's eyes swept the room unseeingly, passed the corner where Nancy's wedding-party still stood, Ernest united to Sylvia, Pauline to Frederick. "Mother'll be so glad," she said.

"Well, Bertha, I'm glad the worst of your worries are over," Mr. Martin was saying. "And I



really think Pauline will make Frederick a fine wife."

"I think so, too," Mrs. Martin agreed heartily. "I call her a very smart girl. She cooks beautifully when she wants to. And she's as clever with her needle! Does beautiful fancywork. And she makes half the things she wears. Yes, I realized this morning that Ernie didn't care. I never saw him in such high spirits. Up before breakfast and singing and whistling just the way he used to when he was a little boy!"

"Yes, and there's another thing you'll be glad to hear," Mr. Martin went on. "He's given up that idea of tramping abroad with Williston and Turner. He had a long talk with Tug and me on the train this morning. He wants to go to work in the office the moment he gets his sheepskin."

"Well," Mrs. Martin ejaculated, "if that isn't the best news I've heard for a long time."

Immediately after dinner, Phoebe appeared. Tug and Mr. Martin went out on the piazza for a smoke.

The conspirators gazed at each other.

"Well, mother," Phoebe said jubilantly. "We won!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Martin, her joy beaming in every line of her face, "Ernest's heart-whole and fancy-free. We won."

## CHAPTER X

### PHOEBE AND THE MOST IMPORTANT BIRD

“**E**DWARD!” Mrs. Martin’s voice was the kind that ordinarily blurred on the telephone, but to-day a peremptory tone of command, a staccato note of excitement, sharpened and clarified it. “I’m talking from Phoebe’s house. Phoebe called me up an hour ago. I hurried right over, but this is my first free moment. Everything is all right. Dr. Bush has been and gone. The nurse has just come. I’ve telephoned Ernie not to come out—he’s going to the ball game. You’d better get dinner in town. And, Edward, I don’t suppose it’s any use saying this to you, but if you would only go somewhere for an hour or two this evening—to Keith’s or any place like that—I do think it would be the most sensible thing you could do. Now, remember what I say. Everything is all right here. Phoebe’s chattering away with the nurse this moment about that first dance she ever gave. There’s nothing to worry about. Good-by.”

“Good-by,” Mr. Martin answered mechanically. It seemed to him that there were many questions that he wanted to ask, but he could not think of a single one. Mechanically he hung up the receiver. He sat for a moment, silent. Then, still mechanic-

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ally, he opened a drawer in his desk and took out a note in Phoebe's handwriting. It had come to him months ago in mid-morning haste, flourishing a special delivery stamp. It read:

FATHER DEAREST:

This is to tell you, so that you may know as quick as anybody, that the Most Important Bird is going to make Tug and me a visit. Now I'm going up to tell mother.

Your loving,

PHOEBE.

Oh, father, I'm so happy.

It was curious how differently this news had affected Mr. and Mrs. Martin. Mr. Martin was inclined to be silent about the great change which it heralded. He never referred to Phoebe's note—not even to Phoebe herself. Previous to its receipt, he had seen his daughter daily by means of a process described by Phoebe as “intuitive collusion.” If Tug and Phoebe did not appear at the Martin place during the evening, Mr. Martin always strolled over to their house just before he went to bed. Nowadays, rain or shine, he always stopped to see Phoebe on his way to Boston. And at his return, he drank down greedily Mrs. Martin's news of the day. As for Mrs. Martin—Mr. Martin used to wonder as he sat nightly in the rich flow of her monologue. Life had suddenly enlarged for her. It had lengthened, broadened, heightened, deepened. She was almost *exaltée*.

"Oh, I'm so happy," she would say again and again. "I'm so happy. I feel as if life was beginning all over again. I declare if there's one thing I've learned, it's to trust life. I used to be so afraid of everything—of all the changes, I mean, the chances and choices. But now I know everything's coming out all right, no matter what it is. And then Phoebe and Tug are both so happy. That's the way it ought to be. And it's come just as I hoped it would. They've had a whole year alone together, just chock-full of good times. They know each other's faults and failings. And now there's something coming that they'll live and work for as they've never lived and worked before. Phoebe says she wants a boy and Tug says he wants a girl. I tell Phoebe I don't care. I'm not looking a gift-horse in the mouth. I guess one reason you're so happy about your children's children is because you can enjoy them without any sense of responsibility. When I look back, it doesn't seem as if I'd ever had the time to enjoy my own children. And, Edward, when I think that there's going to be another baby in the house—well! There's nothing like the comfort you get out of a *little* baby! It loves you so much and it's so helpless and cunning and it hasn't begun to be naughty yet. Not that I want them to be too good. And then, land! you can put them down for a moment and know that they'll be there when you come back."

"Edward, I've never enjoyed any sewing so much as baby-clothes. The materials are all so fine and

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dainty and soft, and the thing's finished before you get tired working on it. You've no idea how baby things have changed since our children were young. So much simpler now—and really prettier, I think. Phoebe's never been much of a hand to sew, but she's doing very well. She says she won't have a machine-stitch in a single thing. My land, she's taking every woman's magazine in the country, seems if—looking up what she calls 'baby-dope.' She says she hasn't read a pretty-girl paper in six months. She says she knows she'll never look smart again because she'll always be so much more interested in how the baby looks. She says she knew her doom was sealed when she gave up a pair of new earrings for some real Val. But I tell her that's all nonsense. And it is—those things take care of themselves."

"Phoebe says she doesn't care who does the housekeeping or if it never gets done—she's going to take care of her baby herself. And I tell her to stick to that. That's the only way you can be sure that things are being done right. Phoebe says she's not going to try to run her children's lives. She says that she hopes that this one will want to go to Harvard like his father—she always talks as if it were a boy. But she says if he makes up his mind to be a *chiroprapist*," Mrs. Martin came down on this word with Phoebe's own italicising vigor, "she won't interfere. She says she's never forgotten the way you let Ernie go to Princeton when you were *just dying*," again Phoebe's forthright accent pushed its way into her mother's speech, "to have him go

to Harvard. She says that it was a great lesson to her."

Little shadowy remembrances of these talks flitted through Mr. Martin's mind as he sat with Phoebe's months-old note in his hand.

"Oh, Edward, I did so hope——" Mrs. Martin began when she opened Phoebe's door to Mr. Martin about half-past six that evening. But she stopped halfway, her eyes on his face. "I don't suppose you *could* stay away," she ended, sighing.

"How is she?" Mr. Martin asked, following his wife into the living-room.

"She's all right. Dr. Bush is upstairs now. He's going home to dinner right away."

Mr. Martin stood still for an instant. He stared about Phoebe's pleasant living-room. But he saw nothing—he was listening. The house was quiet; but it was the quiet of the humming-top. As he came along the street, Theresa's scared white Irish face had peered unaccustomedly at him from the dining-room window. Now a door in the dining-room creaked. Theresa was listening, even as he listened. Mrs. Martin's face was white, too, but it was a radiant whiteness. Altogether she had a new air—curt, alert, secure, victorious. The room bore its normal look of an exquisite order. Everywhere were bowls of fresh June roses—roses that must fade before Phoebe could see them again. Through the open windows drifted the scent of other roses—roses that must die before Phoebe

could pick them. On the table an ivory paper-knife protruded from a half-cut book. A handkerchief marked a place in a magazine. Some of Phoebe's sewing lay near—a tiny drift of snowy linen edged with snowy lace. The light caught on it in a steely glisten—the needle had not been pulled from the last stitch.

“Where's Tug?” Mr. Martin asked.

“Upstairs. He and Phoebe have been playing old maid and checkers and dominoes and California Jack and authors and picture puzzles all the afternoon.”

“Has Ernest come yet?”

“Yes. He's in the kitchen. He got his dinner in town as I told him. But Theresa's feeding him now. She always saves something for him. Oh, here's Dr. Bush. I guess I'll go up for a moment.”

Dr. Bush came running jauntily down the stairs. His big, middle-aged body was surmounted by a head that seemed entirely covered with the combination of bushy, grizzled hair and bushy grizzled beard. Somewhere in the middle of this, a pair of huge search-light spectacles magnified if possible his look of a choleric kindness.

“Hullo, Ed,” he said, fumbling among the things on the settle for his hat. “What are you looking so down in the mouth for? I suppose you've got it into your head that this is a kind of a special occasion. Well, now you forget all that. But don't you go up there. You'll upset her more than anybody, looking the way you do. Now, remember,

Ed, Phoebe's strong as a lion. You couldn't kill her with an axe. She's always taken everything harder than any girl in this town and thrown it off quicker. Her courage is splendid—she hasn't stopped joking yet. So long!"

The door closed on Dr. Bush.

"Hullo, father!" It was Ernest who spoke; he had come in from the dining-room. Ernest also looked pale. "How'd he say Phoebe was?"

"All right," said Mr. Martin.

There was a pause.

"Rotten game?" Mr. Martin inquired.

"Slow as death! Not a ghost of a chance for the Nationals this year and everybody knows it. There wasn't a corporal's guard in the bleachers."

"Matty pitch?"

"No. The Giants are saving him for the Chicago series. They pitched Ames. He did just as well—against us."

"Who for Boston?"

"Some bush leaguer or other that Tenney's just found."

Another pause.

"What was the score?" asked Mr. Martin at last.

"Nine to three."

Another pause.

"Who won?"

"New York, of course."

"Oh, yes—I remember you told me."

Another pause.



"Father," Ernest asked suddenly, "how long is this going to last?"

"Can't tell," Mr. Martin answered. "It may be all night. It may be——"

"Gee, I hate anything like this, father, don't you?"

"It isn't the way I'd choose to spend my evenings," Mr. Martin admitted.

There was another pause.

"Father!" Ernest broke it desperately at last. "I can't stand this any longer. I guess I'll go down to Sliney's and bowl a string or two. It sort of takes your mind off a thing like this to do something. Say, father, don't you think you'd better come too? It's fierce waiting. I've been here only an hour and, Lord, I'm as nervous as the deuce."

Mr. Martin shook his head.

"Well, I won't stir out of Sliney's. You telephone me there, in case you need me for anything—or if——"

"All right," agreed Mr. Martin.

Noiselessly Mrs. Martin returned. "Oh—Bertha—how is it upstairs?" Mr. Martin asked.

"All right," Mrs. Martin answered brightly. "Phoebe's dozing."

"Say, mother," Ernest said, "I'm going out for a while—as long as I can't be of any use here." He kissed his mother.

"All right." Mrs. Martin absently returned his kiss. "I guess——"

"You see, mother," Ernest continued, "it gets

on my nerves waiting round. You don't mind, do you, mother?" There was entreaty in Ernest's voice.

"No," Mrs. Martin answered, still absently. "I guess I'll——"

Mrs. Martin disappeared noiselessly upward.

The door closed on Ernest.

Alone in the living-room, Mr. Martin moved deliberately up to the center-table. Deliberately he cleared away the decorative litter on it—the bowl of roses, a big photograph of himself in a silver frame, the gay-covered gift-books, a magazine or two. He took out his watch, snapped it from the chain, opened it, and placed it on the table. He reached into the pocket of his coat and brought out a pack of cards. He laid out Canfield.

"Hullo, dad!" Tug had come noiselessly downstairs. Tug's voice was quiet; but he, too, displayed the general facial whiteness.

"Hullo, Tug," Mr. Martin rejoined. "How is it up there?"

"They tell me everything's going as well as we can expect. That nurse—Miss Burton—is a crackerjack. Black queen on your red king, dad."

"Pretty disturbing business," Mr. Martin volunteered.

"Oh, Lord, it's—I never—well——" Tug did not attempt to finish his sentence. "Red eight on your black nine. Good! There's another ace. You need a six the worst way. Too bad! I guess you're through. How often do you average to do it?"

"Once or twice in an evening." Mr. Martin shuffled and re-dealt.

For a moment there was no sound in the room but the soft fall of the cards. Then from upstairs came voices—the hurry of footsteps.

Mrs. Martin came down. "You go up, Tug," she said. "She's awake. She wants you."

Tug bolted.

"How are things going?" Mr. Martin asked.

"Oh, beautifully," Mrs. Martin said. Her manner was still buoyant and her face bright; but her tone was a little flat. "Phoebe thought she'd like to talk with Tug awhile." Before seating herself, Mrs. Martin walked over to the window and glanced out in a casual way. Then she moved a chair—quietly—so that it faced the end of the street. She sat with her eyes nailed to the distance.

Gradually the atmosphere of the house changed; into the quiet which Dr. Bush had left crept a vague element of disorganization.

"Don't you think I'd better telephone Dr. Bush, Bertha?" Mr. Martin asked after a long silence.

"Oh, no," Mrs. Martin said. She seemed almost shocked. "He said not to telephone him unless the nurse told us to. Did you bring out a paper, Edward?"

Mr. Martin handed her his *Transcript*. Mrs. Martin studied it carefully. At regular intervals, her eyes started at the bottom of a column, wandered up—up—up—until they hurdled its heads, shot out the window and down the street.

"Bertha," Mr. Martin said after a half an hour of this, "I'm going to telephone Bush."

"Listen!" Mrs. Martin commanded peremptorily. Came from the distance a faint chu-r-r-r-r which grew rapidly into chug-chug-chug. "Here he comes!" Her tone gushed relief.

Dr. Bush stopped at the gate, tinkered for a long moment about his car, walked leisurely up the path, stopped to examine a rose, snapped something off a petal, passed leisurely through the door which Mrs. Martin held open for him, pushed back his goggles, threw his hat onto the hall-settle, stopped an instant in the doorway of the living-room.

"Good work, Ed!" he commended genially. "Say, you needed that ace, all right. Red six on your black seven. Black two on your red three! No, don't take that two. Take the other one. Well, let's see how things are going!" He proceeded leisurely upstairs.

Mr. Martin stopped and listened for a moment. The house responded at once to the stir of the doctor's big, bustling, energetic, dynamic presence, responded—but curiously—by a sudden, serene quiet.

Mr. Martin resumed his work with the cards.

After a long while Dr. Bush came down. "Well, everything's fine as silk here," he said. "I'm only wasting time. Phoebe's just asked me not to interrupt her dominoes again. I might as well enjoy myself this evening as not. I say, Ed, what do you say to going down in the car with me? We'll stop in for one round of the moving pictures."

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"Guess not, Allen!" Mr. Martin answered. "Thank you just as much."

"All right," Dr. Bush said. "I'm going to run up the street and take a look at old Mrs. Hooker. See you later."

Again the room filled with the soft slipping sound of the cards. Again, the house that had grown so serene appeared to lose its grip on itself.

"I finished my string at Sliney's." It was Ernest. There was a dull, listless note in Ernest's voice; and his pallor had increased. "So I thought I'd run up and see how things were going. How's Phoebe?"

"The doctor says everything's all right so far," Mr. Martin said.

"Lord, I'm glad. I hate to think of Phoebe suffering up there. Gee, father, Phoebe's been an awful good sister to me. The things she used to try to work out of you for me! Why, if anything happened to Phoebe, I—I don't know what I'd do. There, that clears that space, father. No, don't—yes, that's all right. Say, where are all the sevens? I bet you're going to do it. Well, isn't that the limit? Look here, father, let me teach you a new solitaire I got the other day. It's a corker, Napoleon."

Mr. Martin watched patiently while Ernest placed all fifty-two cards on the table. He listened patiently to Ernest's long and complicated directions. "Now you've got the hang of it," Ernest directed, "try it alone." Mr. Martin patiently laid out the cards.

Mrs. Martin came in.

Mr. Martin's hand paused.

"How about it, mother?" Ernest asked.

"Oh, everything's all *right*, of course. But—well, there's nothing to do but wait. Dr. Bush'll be here pretty soon."

Mrs. Martin openly took up her station at a window. Ernest watched her for a while.

The cards began to slip and slide over the bare table. Mr. Martin returned to his Napoleon.

Suddenly Ernest jumped to his feet, hat in hand. "Mother, I guess I'll go down to Sliney's and bowl another string. I'll be back again soon. I don't know why it is, but this waiting seems to get on my nerves. It's worse than anything I've ever—It's worse even than before a big game. Do you notice it, mother?"

His mother stared at him an instant. There was a sudden uncharacteristic grimness in her simple "Yes, I notice it, Ernie."

"I hope that you don't mind my leaving, mother. It isn't that I want to lie down on the job. But you see——"

"No, I don't mind," Mrs. Martin said mechanically.

"If I could be of any use, I'd stay—gladly. I'd——"

"I know, Ernie," Mrs. Martin said, still perfunctorily. Her eyes showed that she was not listening to her son.

"Good-by, mother." Ernest kissed his mother.

The door closed on Ernest for the second time; in an instant his rapid gait had lost him in the night.

Mr. Martin shuffled the uncompleted Napoleon layout. He went back to Canfield.

"What time is it, Edward?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Twenty to eleven," Mr. Martin replied instantly.

"Oh!" There was in Mrs. Martin's tone a note of disappointment fairly poignant. "I wouldn't let myself look at the clock before. I hoped it was later. I guess I'll go upstairs now."

Mr. Martin shuffled and dealt, and dealt and shuffled. Red cards paired themselves with black cards. Black cards paired themselves with red cards. Needed aces came unexpectedly to the surface of the pack and superfluous kings retired with their retainers to oblivion. Many games were lost almost at the beginning. Many more were lost with victory just in sight. And all the time the quiet in the house slowly seeped away; and confusion boiled in its place.

After a long absence Mrs. Martin came down again.

Mr. Martin's eyes leaped to her face, found his question answered there. All the radiance had gone from Mrs. Martin's pallid mask and many shadows and lines had come into it. She did not once address Mr. Martin, and she did not once sit down—she walked. Through the hall, into the living-room, back to the dining-room, into the hall again, she completed her round scores of times. At

regular intervals, Mr. Martin stopped, his hand dead among the cards.

"Bertha, don't you think we'd better call Dr. Bush?" he would ask.

And "No," Mrs. Martin always replied. "He knows when to come."

Presently the automobile chur-r-ed out of the distance, chugged up to the door. Mr. Martin stopped midway in his deal. Mrs. Martin paused midway across the hall. "Well, well," Dr. Bush said after his first swift look at the two faces, "glad I came when I did. I see my real work is down here." He bounded up the stairs. A door opened. There came through it Tug's voice, welcoming, Miss Burton's voice, inquiring, Phoebe's——

The door shut. Again—and again with a sudden serene quiet—the whole house responded to the doctor's soothing executive presence.

After a while, Dr. Bush came downstairs.

"Everything's fine as a fiddle. Couldn't be better. Guess I've come to stay this time, though. Black jack on your red queen, Ed. It isn't going to be as long as I thought it was. A couple of tens would help now, all right. Mrs. Martin, you'd better ask Theresa to make some coffee for you two. Red seven on your black eight, Ed. That helps a lot. By Jove, you've done it."

Mrs. Martin drifted in the direction of the kitchen.

"Any danger, Allen?" Mr. Martin asked.

"Danger!" Dr. Bush snorted. "Not a bit. I



tell you Phoebe's got the constitution of a horse. I know all about her. Remember, Ed, I brought Phoebe into the world. Who's that—oh, Ernest!"

"Slincy's closed," Ernest said drearily. Ernest was white—whiter than when he left—and his figure sagged to match his voice. "I had half a mind to go in town. But, somehow, I couldn't. Oh, *mother!*" Ernest stared at Mrs. Martin as she emerged from the hall. "How's Phoebe?"

"She's all right, Ernest," Dr. Bush answered before Mrs. Martin could speak. "Everything is going just as well as it possibly can."

"Mother," Ernest begged, "isn't there something I can do? You know this waiting gets on my nerves so—if I could only get busy."

"Ernest," his mother answered—and the occasion was a rare one in which she addressed her son without the diminutive of his name. "Ernest, the thing that you can do that will help me most is to march straight home and go to bed."

Ernest considered this and for a moment with obvious sense of hurt. "All right," he said after a while, "I'll go. But you'll surely 'phone me if you need me?"

"Yes, Ernie," his mother answered patiently, "I'll 'phone you."

"And you'll let me know just as soon——"

"Yes, Ernie, I'll let you know," his mother agreed.

"And you don't think I'm a quitter?"

"Of course not," his mother reassured him.

"You see—it's the waiting," Ernest explained again.

"Ernie," his mother said, and again there was a touch of grimness in her tone. "A woman's life is *all* waiting. I don't remember a single day in my whole existence that I haven't been waiting—and waiting—and waiting for something that I couldn't possibly hurry!"

Ernest walked to the door. With his hand on the knob, he turned back. The hall-light glittered on his wet eyelashes. "Would you like to know what I think of all this?" he asked in a dogged tone. "Well, I'll tell you. I think it's a hell of a business."

"Yes, Ernie," Mrs. Martin said—and the grimness had deepened in her voice, "but what you think about it won't change things any. It always has been this way and it always will be."

The door closed for the last time on Ernest.

"Well," said Dr. Bush, "I guess I'll take another look-see."

He strolled leisurely upstairs. Mrs. Martin followed, her toes touching his heels.

A long time passed.

Mrs. Martin came downstairs. "Don't ask me," she answered Mr. Martin's look. She resumed her monotonous pacing—but now she almost ran. Suddenly a door opened—it was the door leading from the dining-room to the kitchen. Halfway across the table, Mr. Martin's hand stopped as if it had been pinned there with a knife.

"I told you to keep that back-stairs door—shut!" Mrs. Martin hissed. Theresa deposited the coffee-tray, hurried away panic-stricken.

Ignoring the coffee, Mr. Martin walked into the dining-room, opened a door in the sideboard, fumbled among the bottles there. He poured out a glass of whisky.

Mrs. Martin poured a cup of coffee, drank it almost at a gulp, disappeared upstairs.

Mr. Martin returned to his cards.

But now many things happened.

Mrs. Martin came down. Tug came down, disheveled, ghastly-faced, tagging Mrs. Martin, begging for reassurance.

After a while they went upstairs together.

A faint tap sounded at the front door. Mr. Martin opened it to Mrs. Warburton, who stood swaying, her cheeks streaked with tears. In the background drooped Mr. Warburton—white and anxious-looking.

Mrs. Martin came down again.

Tug came down—a Tug, utterly wilted, who put his head on his mother's shoulder and frankly cried—a Tug who, at last forcing composure, sent his gaze again and again in dumb entreaty to Mrs. Martin's face.

After a while Mr. and Mrs. Warburton left.

Mrs. Martin went upstairs.

Tug went upstairs.

Mr. Martin turned to his cards again.

Another long wait, and Dr. Bush came down—still dynamic, still cheery—but a little less bustling and energetic. He rapidly drank two cups of coffee and went upstairs again.

Another wait—the longest of all—and Mrs. Martin returned. Apparently she had no strength left for pacing the room. She fell into a chair, her head in her hands, her hands over her ears. Mr. Martin dealt and re-dealt the cards. And the house rang with the din of a battle in which Life fought, hand-to-hand, with Death.

Suddenly—it was as if a new turmoil had forced itself into the saturated air—came a change. Mrs. Martin's hands came down from her ears. Mr. Martin's hands dropped the half-dealt pack. Mrs. Martin lifted her head and listened. Mr. Martin dropped his head and listened. Everything was slowing up. The house seemed to be settling towards silence. It came—complete silence—the silence of the vacuum. Mr. Martin's watch rang like a gun. The hall-clock boomed like a cannon. The silence changed—it thickened, solidified, became a tangible thing—adamantine—terrifying. And then——

A sound tore through it. It was a little sound. And yet it had tremendous character. It was not a moan, or a groan, or a wail. It was a yell. And it was a yell, component of many emotions, surprise, perplexity, dismay, indignation, wrath. It was lusty, and yet it was the voice of weakness.

Mr. Martin did not move. But Mrs. Martin did. She became motion itself. She did not run

nor fly, she floated. She floated with an unimaginable swiftness, like a feather on a cyclone. It was as if she were sucked up the broad stairway, borne away by some mysterious magnetic current.

Mr. Martin waited, without stirring from the position in which she had left him, waited—waited—waited——

And then, suddenly, Mrs. Martin appeared on the stairs again. Her face was clay and charcoal, but her eyes were moons. She carried a bundle in her arms. Mr. Martin's eyes fixed on it. It was little and white and soft. Sounds came from it—peeps—as if it held a bird, new-hatched. Mrs. Martin drew a veil of fluff away from the sounds and Mr. Martin looked at what she displayed.

“Phoebe's little girl, Edward!” Mrs. Martin breathed.

She placed the bundle in Mr. Martin's arms.

Mr. Martin sat for a long time looking into the face of his granddaughter.

Dr. Bush came down. Mr. Martin stared at him, wordless.

“She's all right,” Dr. Bush said. “Our only problem now will be to keep Phoebe in bed. It's a fine baby, too—strong as an ox—Phoebe's going to have a handful.”

Mrs. Martin had accomplished another of her mysterious appearances. “She's a beautiful baby, doctor,” she said, taking the white bundle from her husband's arms. “Beautiful! The image of

Ernie!" She disappeared, trailing whispered baby-talk.

"Phoebe says she wants to see you, Ed," Dr. Bush went on. "She won't rest well unless she does. Now hold on to yourself, old man."

"Oh, I'm all right, Allen."

Mr. Martin walked up the stairs, walked through the hall, walked into Phoebe's big, yellow-and-white front room, walked to the foot of the bed. The dawn was coming in at the window, but the electric-light was still on. It shone on two heads on the pillow—one, tiny, pinky, bare as an eggshell, the other——

Was this still, spent, sagging creature Phoebe? Two braids meandered across the white pillow. The light tangled in them, flashing glints of gold; but about her brow the hair was damp and dark. One curl had glued itself in a wet black spiral against her forehead. The dimple under her eye was ironed out. Her lower lip hung slack. Yet how tiny she looked, how young, how innocent and helpless. Never in her little-girlhood had she been more a little girl. The heavy lids stirred, lifted—— Was this star-faced woman *Phoebe*? Her eyes were twin pools of light. All the joy in the universe lay in them. Joy—and a something that soared beyond it. Phoebe had gone for a while into a different world; she was still living there. An instant she looked at her father. Then she spoke. Her words came dead between unfamiliar weak pauses; but she was all Phoebe.

"Pretty—snappy—work—Mr. Martin!" she said. And then, "Do—you—love—my—little—girl—father—dearest?"

When Mr. Martin answered, his words came slowly, too.

Phoebe's look of holding herself in reserve for her father's coming melted into a radiant smile. The smile died slowly as she drifted into sleep.

"Dr. Bush says he'd rather we wouldn't stay, father," Mrs. Martin was saying next. "He doesn't want that there should be any excitement in the house when Phoebe wakes up. He wants me to go home and to take you home, too."

"All right," Mr. Martin answered docilely.

Mrs. Martin talked all the way home; her husband made no comment. He followed her lead the whole way. It was she who started their expedition across streets, she who initially made the corners, she who manœuvered the turn in at their gate, she who unlocked the door and opened it.

"You go right upstairs," Mrs. Martin said in a whisper. The next instant her voice vibrated in joyous full volume through the house. "Wake up, Uncle Ernie! Phoebe's got a little daughter."

"How's Phoebe?" Ernest called back.

"All right! Phoebe says for you to come over to-morrow and give your niece her first tennis-lesson."

When Mrs. Martin entered their big chamber, Mr. Martin was sitting in the big chair there. Out-



“ Pretty-snappy-work-Mr. Martin ! ” she said. And then, “ Do-  
you-love-my-little-girl-father-dearest ? ”





side the birds were singing. The dawn had come full. Mr. Martin's eyes were closed, but from under his lids the tears were coursing down his face.

"Oh, Edward," Mrs. Martin said—and, for the first time that night her voice broke. "Don't take it like this—please don't. It's not as bad as it seems. Although——" Unaccountably she reverted to the grimness that had characterized her all the evening, "it's as bad as it possibly *can be*. But what I mean is—what men can't understand—it's natural—the suffering all counts—it's *for* something. You forget all the pain when they put the baby in your arms. You don't mind what you've been through. You're glad. You'd go through it again. And Phoebe didn't have such a bad time. Oh, don't take it so hard."

"It isn't that," Mr. Martin said. "It isn't Phoebe exactly, although it *is* Phoebe, of course. Phoebe's all right now—I know that. She's strong—she'll get well. I—it isn't Phoebe—Bertha, it's only that I've been remembering you and—Bertha—how did I live through it twenty-six years ago?"

## CHAPTER XI

### TILL HE GETS HIM A WIFE

“**B**ERTHA,” Mr. Martin’s letter had run, “*I am delighted with the news. We certainly have a great deal to be thankful for; Phoebe married to a man whom we trust and love and now Ernest getting engaged to the nicest kind of girl. Give her my love and tell her how much I admire her and how glad I am that we are going to have her for a daughter.*”

“Do you know what Ernest always talks about, Mrs. Martin, when we’re alone?” Sylvia asked.

Mrs. Martin’s lips drew together in what was palpably an effort to smile. But she looked straight into the happy eyes of the girl who had just announced her engagement to Ernest. “I haven’t any idea, I’m sure,” she said.

“*You!*” Sylvia said, gently triumphant. “Always you—nothing but you.” She paused for an imperceptible instant. But her earnestness brought no answering gleam into Mrs. Martin’s eyes. Mrs. Martin continued to hold her faint smile; it looked as if it had petrified on her face. “I guess you’ve no idea how Ernest adores you,” Sylvia went on, still softly enthusiastic. “He says that when he

was a little boy he thought you were the most beautiful woman in the world. He never knew that any woman could be as beautiful as you until he went to the circus. He says that you've always had the most wonderful control over the whole family. He doesn't remember, he says, that you ever punished him or scolded him; but he would no more have thought of disobeying you than—than——" Sylvia's speech was full of hesitancies which always ended in endearing little futilities of phrase, gentle compromises of emotion with expression—"than anything," she finally brought out. "Ernest says he disobeyed his father lots of times—openly and on the quiet—but he never disobeyed you once. He says it never entered his head that he *could*. He told me that the first year he was in Princeton he was always comparing the men's mothers with you and he never found one that wasn't an—an—an also-ran." Sylvia hesitated a long time before she took this verbal plunge into her lover's slang.

Mrs. Martin's mechanical smile still held its own.

"Ernest says——" Sylvia started on.

"Everything's ready, Sylvia," Mrs. Parker called from the other side of the room where, while she prepared the tea, she had been talking with Cousin Debbie.

The sisters busied themselves with the cups. Cousin Debbie started one of her cheerful, chirping monologues. But Mrs. Martin, now that there was no necessity of talking or listening, relaxed for an instant. Every line of her figure sagged. Her face

fell into incipient old-age masses. Occasionally her dull eyes went to Sylvia's face, to Marian's, back to Sylvia's.

There was a strong family resemblance between the girls, although they were differing blonde types. Mrs. Parker was more flaxen than Sylvia, taller, thicker, a little bovine. Everything about her was big and tranquil. A thick crown of smooth hair coiled above her broad, placid brow; large meditative gray eyes shone beneath it. Her mouth, even, was ample and quiet. Maternity had left its traces on her figure; and at the temples her hair had frosted a little. Superficially, she was a more impressive figure than Sylvia. Yet Sylvia would always shine like a light in a shady place. Now, for instance, she showed in an extra thinness and whiteness the fatigues of her long year of teaching. But perhaps she had never seemed more ethereal. It was as if her happiness were an interior flame which glowed in a pale-silver light through her delicate skin, and flooded in a deep-blue radiance into her soft eyes. It seemed actually to lick the air in the pale-gold tendrils of her filmy hair.

"Will you have lemon or cream?" Sylvia was asking presently. "And how many lumps?" Marian was adding. And, "Oh, how good that tastes!" Cousin Debbie was commenting. Debbie did not relax. Even as she drank, the sharp glances of her bright brown little eyes were leaping over her cup and darting hither and yon.

It was a modest establishment—the little half-

house which was the Parker home and Sylvia's. It showed in every detail the brave fight which the Gordon girls had made against poverty. The pictures and bric-à-brac, few but rigorously good, the furniture, simple and carefully correct, the bare floor, the quiet paper—all these things did their best to offset the effect of the gilded moldings and the carved and mirrored mantels. Everything was exquisitely neat, and yet a first glance showed that the children played all over the house. A family of dolls huddled together on the couch. A tiny tin engine had brought a line of cars to rest within the enclosure of the gas-log fireplace. The sisters reflected all this exquisite care and order. It was easy to guess that no hired fingers had produced the unlined, unfolded laundering—delicate as blown glass—of their simple shirt-waist gowns. There was an extra touch of holiday in the daffodils which lifted, Japanese fashion, out of broad shallow dishes.

Mrs. Martin put her cup down after a while and fumbled in her muff. "Mr. Martin wanted me to tell you, Sylvia, that unless you preferred something else, he would like to give you for an engagement-gift a cedar chest like the one he gave Phoebe."

Sylvia's smile made a flash of lightning whiter than her face. "Oh, that is so like Mr. Martin," she said. "What a dear thing to do! I should love a cedar chest more than—more than—anything I can think of. I—I—couldn't have had one otherwise."

"It was his own idea," Mrs. Martin added

scrupulously. "I brought my gift out to-day." She handed the little package to Sylvia.

"Oh, what fun it is being engaged!" Sylvia exclaimed. "Like Christmas all the time." Her tiny fingers picked carefully at the bow which tied the box and, as if the instinct of order were ever with her, she rolled up the ribbon and smoothed out the tissue-paper covering before she opened the package. "Oh, spoons!" she exclaimed in a delighted tone. "And just the pattern I love! How did you know it, Mrs. Martin?"

"Ernie told me," Mrs. Martin answered. "Phoebe thought that spoons were a kind of commonplace present—bromidic, she called it. But I never have forgotten the experience Mr. Martin and I had when we got married. I calculated that folks would surely give us spoons. And so I didn't buy any. But everybody gave us forks, and so when we got back from our honeymoon we had to use tin kitchen spoons on the table until I could get into Boston and buy some. And in these days, when you need so many spoons——"

"I think it was lovely of you," Sylvia said. "And I do thank you." She made a little impulsive movement toward Mrs. Martin. But she checked it halfway—perhaps she could not have said why.

"Mr. Martin will be at home Friday night," Mrs. Martin went on with the mechanical fidelity, to what was palpably a cut-and-dried recital, of a graphophone to its record. "And then we're both coming over to see you. I didn't want to wait so

long myself." Mrs. Martin was not telling the exact truth here. What she should have said was: "I saw that Ernie did not want me to wait so long." She paused an instant and visibly cast about in her mind to see if her lesson were said. "Oh," she caught herself up. "And then Mr. Martin and I want you to visit us in your Easter vacation. Phoebe wants you to come right to her as soon as you've been to us. But I hope you'll stay a week with us. I guess you'll have to make up your mind to spend the rest of the spring in Maywood."

"Oh, I shall just love that," Sylvia said. "How kind you all are to me."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Martin. "And now we must be going. Debbie is taking the six train to North Campion. It was so nice that she could come with me."

The sisters murmured gentle echoes of this sentiment.

"And remember, Sylvia," Mrs. Martin went on, "Phoebe and I want to help you all we can with your sewing. Bring along as much as you can."

"I guess it won't be so very much, Mrs. Martin," Sylvia said bravely. "You see—I'm—I'm—I'm going to have a very modest *trousseau*."

"It's much better that way," Mrs. Martin came to her rescue. "It's foolish getting so much, especially when styles change so. Why, Phoebe told me only yesterday that she's got some table-linen that she's never used yet, and now she never will because it's so out-of-date. I told her to give it to



me." Mrs. Martin emitted a spark of her characteristic asteism. "I'd be very grateful for it."

"And how is little Bertha-Elizabeth?" Marian asked.

A transient gleam flickered in Mrs. Martin's dead eyes. "Oh, very well, thank you. She's a quiet little thing, you know. But she's *never* sick. Now we must go." Mrs. Martin shook hands with Marian. She leaned forward and touched Sylvia's cheek with her lips.

"What do you think of her, Marian?" Sylvia asked eagerly after their guests had gone.

"Oh, she's a *lovely* woman," Marian said heartily. "I can see just what kind of mother she's been. She's just lived for her children. We don't have that kind nowadays. I don't think she looks very well, though. She seems sort of—well, listless."

"I didn't notice," Sylvia said. "But she is lovely. She's always been so kind to me. And you should hear the things Ernest says about her." Sylvia stopped talking suddenly and peered anxiously about. "I think the house looked pretty, don't you, Marian? I hope the dust hasn't rolled up under the furniture the way it does." Her brow puckered. "Somehow I felt sad all the time she was here. I guess it was because I kept thinking of mother and how she would have enjoyed all this. If she had only lived a few years longer! Somehow, Marian, it seems to me that I never missed her so much as in the last few days."

"Well now, those girls are neat housekeepers, I

tell *you!*” Debbie said, as soon as they were out of earshot. “I couldn’t see a speck of dust or dirt. The mopboards was as clean as a whistle and you could have et your dinner off the floor anywhere. Mrs. Parker’s a pleasant woman, isn’t she? And Sylvia’ll be real pretty when she fills out a little. But she’s the last girl in the world that I’d have expected Ernest Martin to pick out—I must say. I thought he’d choose somebody terribly stylish. Didn’t you think a little while ago that he was kinder sweet on that Florence Marsh?”

“Yes, I did hope—I—I—mean—for a while it looked as if he was.”

“Well,” Debbie said judicially, “I should be mighty glad it had turned out this way if he was my son. Florence Marsh is a nice girl, but, my grief!—she’s *awful* homely. My land! What queer things do come about! Who’d have thought that when Phoebe came home from Marblehead that time so crazy about a girl that was waiting on table at the hotel there that——”

“Debbie!” Mrs. Martin said peremptorily, “I don’t want that you should say *one word* in North Campion about Sylvia’s waiting on table. That’s all past and forgotten and there’s no reason why anybody should know anything about it.”

“Well, Bertha Brooks! Do you suppose I ever *would?*” Debbie exclaimed in a shocked tone.

But Mr. Martin came home unexpectedly that very night. “Well,” he said after he had kissed

his wife, "this *is* news about Ernest, isn't it? I finished that business right up and came home. I had to. I hadn't the remotest suspicion of anything of the sort. Did you see it coming? Or was it a surprise to you?"

"Yes," Mrs. Martin admitted tonelessly, "it was a surprise to me." She gave a quick, furtive look at her husband. "What do you think about Ernie's being married so young, Edward?"

"Oh, I'm as tickled as Punch," Mr. Martin said heartily. "I believe in young marriages, mother—for men. I think a man ought to have the responsibility of a family just as soon as he's able to support one. And Ernest has worked like a beaver for two years. Sylvia's such a fine girl, too, and such a plucky one. Lord, how she's worked! My heart used to ache for her when she'd start right in teaching in the summer-school the moment her college-year had ended. There's real stuff in Sylvia."

"Yes, she's a heroine," Mrs. Martin agreed. "I've always said that."

Mr. Martin kept on. "I'm glad you went right over there, mother, without waiting for me to get home. It isn't as if Sylvia had a father and mother. But those two girls all alone like that—— We can call together to-morrow, can't we?"

"Yes, if you like. Wasn't your train late, Edward?"

"No. I stopped to see the baby."

"Was she awake at this hour?"

"Yes. Delia said she'd slept right through the

whole afternoon." Mr. Martin's tired, cinder-lined face lighted up. "Knew me the moment she saw me. Began doing that patty-cake business without my saying a word to her. Delia says she's begun to talk—and she put her through some little tricks. Well, I suppose it's what you-women call talking. But I'd hate to have my life depend on the accuracy with which I translated it. She didn't have a drop of sleep in her—jounced up and down in my lap until she tired me all out. I got her quieted down gradually and she fell asleep in my arms. Phoebe hadn't got in yet, but I left word for her to come up this evening. I suppose Phoebe's delighted about the engagement."

"She hasn't talked about anything else since," Mrs. Martin replied. "Nor Tug. Tug seems very fond of Sylvia."

"Well, Sylvia shows her pluck in being willing to start married life on so little. It isn't as if Ernest could offer his wife what Tug offered Phoebe."

Mrs. Martin bristled. "I don't know what more a man could have to offer a woman than Ernie's got."

"Well—what I mean is—Ernest and Sylvia will have to count the pennies. Phoebe thinks she economizes but Sylvia's really got to do it."

Mrs. Martin remained silent—her lips held in tight parallel lines.

"And her courage!" Mr. Martin went on. "Why, just think of the strength of mind it meant

to take a job as waitress in order to get through college."

"*Edward!*" The word exploded from Mrs. Martin's closed lips. Mr. Martin looked at her in surprise. "Edward, I do wish that you wouldn't refer to Sylvia's having been a waitress. Nobody knows it in Maywood but Mrs. Warburton and she's just as likely to have forgotten it."

"But—but—Bertha—— You surely don't think it's anything to be ashamed of."

Mrs. Martin's eyes dropped. "No," she said with a slight hesitation. "But perhaps if Ernest has children, he wouldn't like them to know that their mother waited on table."

"Well—but—why—I——" Mr. Martin actually stuttered in his bewilderment. "Good Lord! If I were Ernest, I'd be proud to have my children know it. But of course I won't make any reference to it, if you think I'd better not. I remember it shocked your people to find out that I'd worked in a machine-shop for a while. I never could get the hang of this social game as you-women play it. What makes anybody *somebody* and what makes him *nobody* is beyond me."

"It's only," Mrs. Martin said almost inaudibly, "that I'm thinking of Ernie's children."

And then a silence fell between them, a silence so deep that it lasted until the whole room waked up to Phoebe's brilliant, forthright presence.

And Phoebe was saying:

"Oh, Father Martin, how glad I am to see you

—you duck! I've missed you *terribly*. And what do you think of your granddaughter learning to talk while you were gone? I hear that you and she had a great gab-fest this afternoon. And think of Ern Martin's being engaged! Why, it seems only yesterday that I was working you for a football suit for him. And to Sylvia of all people! Isn't it the luckiest thing that mother and I saved Ern from Pauline Marr that time? Little I wotted the service I was doing my best friend. I'm perfectly *dippy* about the whole thing. I've always been crazy about Sylvia, you know. She's the only person on earth that's ever bossed me. But I've always taken anything from her. There's something so angelically *darling* about Sylvia."

And Tug was saying:

"Hullo, dad! Isn't that a great kid we've got up to the house? Talking in seven different unknown languages at twenty months. I'm afraid the scientists will get on and want to experiment with her. Oh, sure! Sylvia's been my candidate from the start. Some bean on that girl, let me tell you. Easy to look at, too."

Last of all, Ernest had joined them—an Ernest whose eyes shone with a new joy, whose movements seemed to throw off electric sparks of triumph.

And Ernest was saying:

"Thanks, father! You *betchu!* Oh, Lord, Phoebe, what a question! I don't know when it began—the first time I saw her, I guess. Considerable conch, believe me! Sure, I admit it. I've got

the worst case on record. I nearly stopped in the rush-hour in the subway yesterday to tell the ticket-chopper all about it. That's all right, Tug. You can't bring the blush of modesty to this damask cheek. I glory in my shame. I'm going to have an electric sign put out in front of the house—ME FOR SYLVIA—in eight-foot letters."

And last of all, Mrs. Martin herself was saying:

"Edward, I guess I'll have the florist come up to-morrow and lay out a plot of ground for me. I've always thought that sometime I'd have a rose-garden like Aunt Mary's. I sort of feel as if it would do me good to work out-of-doors this spring."

This was the first day of the three months which came between the announcement of Ernest's engagement and Ernest's wedding.

It was a strange three months for Mrs. Martin. Nothing in it was as it had ever been before. Ernest lived in the house exactly as he had lived ever since his boyhood; but he was no more a part of the family life than the sunbeams which made their daily round of the windows. He might have been a disembodied spirit—the spirit of happiness. He spent every evening with Sylvia. When he came down to breakfast in the morning, his eyes still sparkled with what of her was left over from the night before. When he came home to dinner at night, his eyes glowed with the anticipation of her. Ernest whistled and sang more than ever before in his life; but he talked less.

His intimacy with his mother seemed to be utterly suspended. Before his engagement was announced, he used to make to Mrs. Martin's room the instant he got into the house, no matter what the hour. However deep Mrs. Martin's sleep, his step outside her door always waked her. They would talk for a few moments before Ernest went to bed. Now he walked straight to his room—as if present experience were so magic, so precious, so sacred that he could not share it with mortal being. Sometimes, without warning, Ernest would throw his arms about his mother and treat her to a monster hug. Mrs. Martin never returned his embrace, although she always submitted patiently. But often in the midst of it, Ernest's arms would fall away, his eyes would grow absent.

“My *goodness!* I never saw two people so much in love as Ern Martin and Sylvia Gordon,” Phoebe exclaimed again and again. “Mother, there's something positively pathetic about their absorption in each other. I bet I know the answer, too. Sylvia's never had a real home since her mother died. She's been pushed from pillar to post and from post back to pillar again—until now the idea that she's going to have a place of her own seems like a fairy-tale come true. She told me the other day that she's made out a list of things that she's *not* to do, she's so afraid of growing into a careless wife—things like not looking pretty at breakfast and not being trim in regard to belts and neckwear, and *above all* not getting round-shouldered. Ever since she's been



earning her own money, she's bought things with the idea of having a home sometime. Why, mother, she has the darlindest collection of ivory elephants—*tiny*—but no two the same size; and several beautiful, foreign photographs, exquisitely framed. And the loveliest Wedgewood tea-set—she bought it *piece by piece*—and a lot of Chinese and Japanese things that she's picked up here and there that are so different from anything you see in anybody else's house. She said she always thought she was destined to be an old maid; but she intended to have a home of her own just the same, and the moment she could afford it she was going to adopt two children. Let me tell you, Mother Martin, there won't be a place in this town so individual, so original, and so *quaint* as Sylvia's. But what I can't understand is *Ern Martin's* going so wild about domesticity. It isn't as if he hadn't always had a good home. How do you account for it, mother? "

Mrs. Martin replied that she had not thought of the matter.

Superficially Mrs. Martin seemed occupied. The rose-garden proved an ambitious affair. And she insisted on doing all the work in it herself. Early and late she spaded, weeded, snipped, and watered. The long hours in the open air tanned her prematurely. This partially concealed the fact that she was steadily growing thinner.

And all the while things were happening—it was as though Event were in collusion with Time—which brought the wedding-day nearer and nearer.

The first thing was Mr. and Mrs. Martin's joint call on Sylvia. This time Mrs. Martin remained silent; it was Mr. Martin who did all the talking. And Sylvia sat, her deep eyes fixed on Mr. Martin's face, her cheeks pink with happiness, her delicate lips curved into a happy smile.

The next thing was Phoebe's and Tug's engagement-call, conducted on Phoebe's part with so much mock grandeur that Sylvia laughed without ceasing all the time she stayed.

The next thing was Sylvia's visit. It came in her spring vacation and lasted ten days. Then there was nothing all day long but talk of the marriage; the air was saturated with it. Early in the morning, Phoebe would arrive, wheeling a perambulator in which little Bertha-Elizabeth, sucking a fat clandestine thumb, lay concealed under a mountain of sewing materials. Or else, Phoebe insisted on bearing Mrs. Martin and Sylvia away to her house for luncheon. At dinner, Ernest asked questions that had to do only with their progress. Immediately afterwards, in order to correct the confining effect of her teaching, he took Sylvia for a long auto-ride. When they came back, Phoebe and Tug were always there. The marriage-talk immediately started up again.

Sylvia shone with the same strange preoccupied happiness which distinguished Ernest. Her eyes seemed not to see what their gaze fell upon, unless it happened to be Ernest; then their dreams melted to an angelic tenderness. At no time a talker, she

seemed more quiet than ever. But when Ernest drew her out about their housekeeping plans, her eyes flitted instinctively from Mrs. Martin's dead face and came to rest on Mr. Martin's look of a smiling sympathy. Those two had many long talks together.

From the Martin house, Sylvia went to Phoebe. But it was as if she had left a little golden shadow of herself in her lover's family. Ernest became more somnambulistic than ever. He arose a half-hour earlier in the morning that he might go into Boston on the same train with her. He breakfasted with his eyes on the clock. That was the last his mother saw of him for the day. He dined every night at Phoebe's.

By this time Mrs. Martin's rose-bushes were in luxuriant leaf.

The next thing was the selection of their home. Ernest and Sylvia looked at everything in Maywood before they decided on the tiny apartment which balanced perfectly between their income and their desire. Mr. Martin had announced that he would furnish their dining-room as a wedding-gift. Sylvia and Ernest began to make the rounds of the dealers in antiques. "You never saw anything like Sylvia, mother," Phoebe said. "She's drawn a plan of every room in her apartment, with the exact measurements written on them. You'd think she was working out a puzzle. She knows exactly where she's going to put every piece of furniture, every picture, and every bit of bric-à-brac." The quar-

tette—Sylvia, Phoebe, Ernest, Tug—spent all their evenings in the barn now, scraping, oiling, and polishing Ernest's share of Aunt Mary's beautiful mahogany.

"Ern Martin," Phoebe crowed over her brother again and again, "I guess you're pretty glad now that I didn't grab off all the family loot that time you told me to—just before I was married. Maybe you think I wasn't tempted to take you at your word. But I guess my guardian angel whispered to me that Sylvia was going to be your wife."

Now, indeed, the family talk had enlarged its scope. When it did not turn on furniture or the rest of the household equipment, it went to the wedding itself.

"Well, mother," Phoebe announced one morning, "I've made up my mind what we're going to wear. I'm going to have a canary-colored satin with a sort of jacket of a *very delicate* black lace picked out with gold thread. And I've thought out the most wonderful scheme for you—gray chiffon cloth—a *dark* gray—and yet not *too* dark—deeper than a pearl, anyway—trimmed with lace dyed a *light* gray. A girdle of silver and royal purple. Do you think you'd like that?"

Mrs. Martin said she thought she would.

The next thing was that Mrs. Martin and Phoebe were actually buying the materials . . . their gowns were being fitted . . . they had come home . . . Sylvia's invitations were out . . . there were only a few days more.

Mrs. Martin's rose-bushes were all in bud.

And then Ernest's wedding-day came.

In the middle of the morning, Phoebe, radiantly handsome in her canary-and-black-and-gold, came to dress Mrs. Martin. "Why, mother," she exclaimed as she helped her out of her morning gown, "how thin you are! I hadn't noticed it. What's the matter?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Martin said languidly. "I guess it's just the spring feeling. Perhaps I've worked too hard in the garden."

"That wouldn't have caused it." A real alarm obscured the brightness of Phoebe's face. "Though you *have* worked hard. And just think of your cutting every single blossom to send to Sylvia. If that wasn't just *like* you. It's all this excitement that's worn you out. I guess I haven't been taking very good care of you, mother. Well, I'll stop this right here or I'll know the reason why. To-morrow I'll march you straight up to Dr. Bush. He's got a tonic—Tug took it last spring. It tastes like a mixture of gasoline and *quick lime*. But it certainly does build you up."

It was a home wedding. The little living-room in the Parker house was almost embowered in the roses which Mrs. Martin had sent. There were not more than a double-score of guests, and these mainly Martin and Brooks kin. The Gordon girls produced a single relative, a step-aunt who had come out of an Old Ladies' Home and who was touch-

ingly grateful for her holiday. Sylvia's other friends were a group of college girls who contributed a real note of gayety to the occasion. Mr. Parker, long, lean, shyly humorous, gave Sylvia away; and Marian, in rose-pink, her face one blur of tears, was matron-of-honor. Sylvia wore a white *crêpe-de-chine* gown, delicately simple, the one dress-maker product of her wedding outfit. She carried a loose bunch of some of Mrs. Martin's white roses. A fillet made from their tiniest buds encircled her hair. The wedding ceremony was performed where the noon sunlight streamed into the room. It shone through the transparent edges of Sylvia's gown and through the aureole of filmy hair that had pulled away from the rosebuds. She seemed like an apparition. Ernest looked like a marble bust of himself.

The affair did not last very long. By a quarter after twelve, the ceremony was over. By one they were eating the delicious salads, ices, and cakes which Sylvia and Marian had prepared themselves. By two, Ernest was kissing his mother good-by—and kissing her with his eyes on Sylvia. By three, the Martin family, minus Ernest, were back in Maywood.

And then days passed of which, afterwards, Mrs. Martin never had any clear recollection.

One afternoon Mrs. Martin was bending over the weakling of her rose-flock. Suddenly an arm

came about her from above, lifted her upright, swirled her around.

"Oh, mother!" Ernest said. That was all he said. But he kept repeating the word over and over—as if he had lost a precious formula and found it again. As for Mrs. Martin, she said nothing. She dropped her head onto her son's shoulder. It stayed there for a long time.

"Where's Sylvia?" Mrs. Martin asked presently, wiping her eyes.

"She's at the apartment. We've just got in and she was pretty tired and dusty. We're coming up together this evening. But I couldn't wait until then to see you. Don't let's go in now, mother. Stay out here and talk."

Ernest came again that evening as he had promised. Sylvia looked rested and happy. She was full of talk about their honeymoon, the wedding-presents that had arrived during their absence, the wonder of their perfect dining-room. After a while, Ernest proposed that his mother take a walk with him. They left Mr. Martin and Sylvia talking. Presently Phoebe and Tug came. Later, the whole family walked back with "the newly-weds," as Phoebe now called them.

Ernest and Sylvia came to dinner at the Martin house the next night. Immediately after they arose from the table, Ernest took his mother for a long stroll in the garden. The next night, Ernest and Sylvia dined with Phoebe and Tug; but on their way

home Ernest stopped for a good-night talk with Mrs. Martin. The next night they went to the Parkers. But at ten o'clock they were back in the Martin house, and Ernest was saying: "Come out in the garden with me, mother. It's one pippin of a night. I've got something to talk over with you." It was the same the next night and the next and many nights after that.

"Well, Mother Martin, that tonic has certainly done wonders for you!" Phoebe exclaimed one day. "Your skin is as pink and your eyes as bright. You look ten years younger. Have you noticed, though, how quiet Sylvia seems nowadays? Most brides are so proud of their new possessions that they're talking about them all the time. I realize now I ought to have been shut up somewhere, I must have bored people so. It's the queerest thing about Sylvia! I've been down there three afternoons in succession now, and she doesn't seem to show half the enthusiasm about her home that she had before she was married. If I make a suggestion, about something I mean on which she's *asked* my advice, she says, 'Perhaps that would be a good idea!' and changes the subject. And she's begun a lot of things that she shows no interest in finishing. Have you noticed it, mother?"

"Why, no," Mrs. Martin said slowly. "But now you speak of it, she has seemed rather quiet lately."

That afternoon, while Mrs. Martin was working in her garden, a shadow fell across her path. She



looked up. "Mother," Sylvia said without preliminary greeting. "I want to have a talk with you—alone. Before Ernest gets home."

"Why, what is it, Sylvia?" Mrs. Martin asked in alarm. For Sylvia's face might have been cast in lead.

"I've felt for a long time that I must tell somebody," Sylvia went on in a dull voice, "but at first I didn't know who to go to. Of course my first thought was Marian. But it seemed to me that, as long as it is something which concerned Ernest, I had no business to tell her. I worked it out that the only thing was to come to you."

"My dear—my dear—what is it?" Mrs. Martin's alarm deepened to terror.

"It's—it's—it's—I guess I've failed as a wife. I see that. I haven't made Ernest happy and I don't believe I ever can. I thought I could, because I was so crazy to have a home of my own. I was very sure that I could make it attractive. But I can't. I've failed."

"*Failed!* What do you mean, Sylvia?"

"He doesn't like our home. He doesn't want to stay in it. He isn't happy there. Every night, the moment we've eaten our dinner, he says, 'Now let's go up and see mother.' He's homesick. I know that. The moment he gets here, he takes you off into the garden alone for a talk. I'm afraid if we didn't live in the same town, where we could see you every day, he couldn't stand it. He's very unhappy. I guess he's sorry he got married."

Mrs. Martin seized Sylvia's arm. "Sylvia," she said—and she shook the girl a little—"do you know what Ernest talks about all the time when he's alone with me?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"*You*," Mrs. Martin said. "*You*—all the time *you*—nothing *but* you. How good you are, how beautiful, and how clever. How he never could have believed that an inexperienced girl could start right in and run a house so well. How delicious the breakfasts are! How dainty the table is set! What wonderful dinners you get up, and what variety, and how economical! And how there are always flowers about even if they're only field flowers. And how he's never seen you untidy yet. In the morning you might be going to a party, you look so pretty and sweet—especially in those little caps and morning-jackets you sometimes wear to breakfast. And how he's being neater than he ever was in his life, so's to keep the house looking pretty when callers come. And how you're never cross? And if he can ever make up his mind to give up one moment of you, he's going to invite all the Princeton men about Boston by squads to meet you. And how proud he was when you came into the office the other day. He said he guessed all the men there envied him a wife like you. And how——"

As Mrs. Martin talked, she saw Sylvia's face fill with a rose-pink tide, her eyes with an azure flood, as that light which had died down on the altar

of her happiness burned up and burst into radiant flame.

*"Edward," Mrs. Martin said that night as they went to bed, "somehow it seems to me I never was so happy in my life as I am now. I think we've got a good deal to be thankful for, Phoebe married to such a nice man and with the dearest baby in the world, and now Ernest getting such a treasure as Sylvia. I had a long talk with Sylvia to-day. I told her what a clever housekeeper she was and how proud we all were of her. When I think of the kind of girl Ernest might have picked out—oh, Edward, I guess I'd better spend the rest of my life trying to be grateful enough!"*

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FOUND CHILDREN

“**B**UT, Mrs. Martin, there’s no use talking, when your children marry, you lose them. Harold has never been the same to me since he married Clara Haywood. He’s gone right over to the Haywoods. He spends every Wednesday and Sunday night of his life with her folks. He only comes to see me when he thinks of it. Of course Ray Carleton is a nice fellow. But he’s so *young*. And *Gracie’s* so young. Somehow I can’t get used to the idea. It seems wicked. What would you do, Mrs. Martin?”

Mrs. Seaver’s little dark sallow face, a mass of wrinkles normally, seemed, under the stress of her emotion, to tie itself into knots. Her claw-like little hands twisted, folding and unfolding. The tears stood frankly in eyes too big and bright for her face, eyes that held the furtive, alert gleam of some very tiny, easily-frightened animal.

Mrs. Seaver’s face offered the one discordant note in the serene calm of the big living-rooms. In the years which had elapsed since Phoebe first took its decoration in hand, the Martin house had acquired some of the beauty of its early days. The wall-papers had faded a little, the mission furniture

showed the marks of use. Mrs. Martin's climbing plants wreathed the noble mantels in their vivid green. Vases and bowls held brilliant bunches of dahlias and asters. Many framed pictures of children littered the tables and bookcases. To-day the house was in the perfection of order. Everything that could shine, shone. A Sunday quiet lay over the rooms, and yet the whole house held an air of tiptoe excitement—as if it awaited something.

Mrs. Martin evidently awaited something. Her eyes kept straying out the window. If the atmospheric values ran down to discord in Mrs. Seaver's face, they ran up to harmony in Mrs. Martin's. Except for that transient flash of expectancy, her look was perfectly placid. She still kept her tall, spare figure; but the years had turned her hair white; they had lined her face deeply.

"Well, I don't know as I know what I'd do," Mrs. Martin answered. "At least, I can't say right off. Of course Gracie is young—only eighteen, isn't she?"

Mrs. Seaver nodded.

"Just think of it!" Mrs. Martin commented. "It seems only yesterday that she was running over here for Phoebe to read 'Little Women' to her."

"Mrs. Martin, to this day Gracie gets 'Little Women' out every once in a while and reads it all over again. That's as undeveloped as she is." Mrs. Seaver wiped her eyes indignantly.

"But when it comes to her marrying so young," Mrs. Martin went on slowly. "I guess I agree

with you. I think most mothers would. It's queer the difference in the way you feel about your children marrying. When Phoebe came to get engaged—she was over twenty, you know—I didn't seem to mind it at all. But Edward took it awfully hard. It seemed as if he never would get reconciled. When Ernie's engagement came out, Edward was simply delighted. But they'd been married a month before I stopped crying nights. I've worked it out that men hate to lose their daughters and women their sons. But they've all got to face it, for marry they will. It's nature."

"Oh, it isn't marriage I object to. Lord knows I don't want Gracie to be an old maid. But when she's so young and all I've got—well, it just seems cruel to have her go so soon. Why, we've done everything together—you *might* say. We did all our shopping together. Once a week, ever since she's been old enough, we've gone to a *matinée* together. I've chaperoned her to every dance. And now that'll be all over. She'll have her own family and her own interests. Oh, it will never be the same again. I'll lose her."

"It will never be the same again," Mrs. Martin agreed. "But I don't think you'll lose her. That is, unless——"

"Why, now, Mrs. Martin," Mrs. Seaver's pessimism flared into a hysterical recklessness, "take you and Phoebe. Phoebe lives in the same town with you, and of course, in a way, you see a lot of her. And yet she's giving luncheons and dinner-

parties and whists all the time, but you don't go to a half of them, nor a quarter."

Mrs. Martin bristled a little. "Yes, that's true," she acknowledged. "But that isn't because I'm not invited or because Phoebe don't want me. It's only because——"

"I know," Mrs. Seaver said, her recklessness giving way to melancholy. "There are plenty of reasons why, but the long and short of it is you don't go. And that's what I'm afraid will happen with Gracie and me. I'll go to everything she gives for a while. Then I'll begin to feel old and *passé* and in the way and as if my clothes weren't right—and I'll make excuses to stay at home. And then I'll get tired of keeping house all alone and she won't want me, so I'll take to boarding. And the first thing I know I'll be one of those old ladies who sit round boarding-house parlors and gossip and knit—except once in a while when I go to Gracie's house for a luncheon of left-overs. And when finally I get so lonely that I can't stand that any longer, I'll enter some Old Ladies' Home. I don't know but what I'd better save myself a lot of trouble by going into one the day after Gracie gets married."

"Oh, Mrs. Seaver!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed in a shocked tone. "But then," she added as if reassuring herself, "you can't. You're not old enough. Oh," she exclaimed joyfully, "there's Phoebe now and Bertha-Elizabeth."

Mrs. Seaver rose hastily. "I guess I don't want

Phoebe to catch me crying. I'll run home by the back way if you don't mind."

"Come over this afternoon, won't you, Mrs. Seaver?" Mrs. Martin entreated. "There's always a lot of young folks here for supper, Sunday night. I know you'll enjoy it."

"Well," Mrs. Seaver said, "perhaps. I don't feel much like it, though." She disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

Mrs. Martin moved over to the window and watched her daughter's approach.

Phoebe had not grown matronly in the last seven years, although the diaphanous look of girlhood had entirely left her. Every physical element in her maiden comeliness had been accented and emphasized. She was a creature now of definite outlines, high lights, glossy surfaces. The willowy, breakable quality in her figure had given way to an air of vigor and virility. The velvety amber-olive of her skin had deepened to an out-of-doors hardness. A permanent color glowed in her cheeks and lips. Her yellow-brown hair looked like carved metal. Her eyes, however, showed a change. Deep under their sparkle lay a little sadness, as if there were one question she put perpetually to fate. But for that, she had the air of a perfectly happy woman.

A little girl in a long gray coat and a high peaked hat walked at her side. She was a slim, frail creature, of a transparent, silver-blond type, with dove's eyes of a deep gray, with cheeks and lips tinted a delicate shell-pink. After a whispered col-



loquy at the gate, she dropped her mother's hand and scampered over to the barn. Phoebe continued up the path.

"Greetings, mother!" she called from the door. And she talked all the way through the hall. "I have never seen such a day. The air is like honey with a drop of wine in it. I've been *drinking* it down. Oh, how I love this season!"

She entered the room with all her accustomed effect of dispersing by the mere force of her vitality every shadow in it.

"Well, you come honestly by it," said her mother. "I love the fall, too. Some folks feel sad when the leaves begin to drop. But there's something about it—I never could tell exactly what—that makes me as *gay*."

"Bertha-Elizabeth and I walked in the gutter all the way up. It's such fun to hear the dead leaves *rustle* and *snap* and *crackle*. It exhilarates me."

"How's it happen Bertha-Elizabeth isn't at Sunday-school?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"She got sort of droopy in church. So I decided I wouldn't let her stay. Somehow she doesn't seem to stand half as much as the other two. Sometimes——" Phoebe paused. That look of perpetual question in her eyes grew almost poignant as an inner anxiety darkened the happy buoyancy of her mood, "sometimes I worry about Bertha-Elizabeth. She looks so—so—sort of—ethereal and far-away. But she is a healthy child, don't you think so, mother?"

"Why, of course she is." Mrs. Martin's emphasis was suspiciously strong. "She's *never* sick."

"I know that—but I have a sort of feeling that she's well only because I keep her so. She's different from the other two. Well, I know it would *kill* me if anything happened to her. Oh, mother," Phoebe changed the subject abruptly, "I've had such a time for two days with Phoebe-Girl. She gets naughtier and naughtier every day of her life. I can't do a thing with her." Phoebe's eyes blazed with that proud indignation with which ever the mothers of mischievous children narrate their exploits. "Now let me tell you what she did this morning. Ellen's mother is ill. She had to leave early yesterday morning and I've had charge of Phoebe-Girl ever since. I'd rather take care of a box of monkeys. Yesterday I couldn't get my bath in, I was so busy looking after her. This morning I drew the tub full of water. She was playing about and I left her alone in the bathroom for just exactly *one minute*. When I came back, everything in the room was in the tub—wash-cloths, clean towels, soap, tooth-brushes, tooth-pastes, bottles, glasses, sponges. I was half an hour cleaning up."

"Did you punish her?"

"It does no good to punish her, mother, she's always so interested in her punishments. She seems to look upon it as some new game we're playing. Then I try reasoning with her. I've talked until I was blue in the face. She listens as if I were telling her a fairy-tale, her eyes sparkling, all her dimples

showing. Then the instant I get through, she goes right straight from my side and does it again."

"Why doesn't Tug attend to her?"

"*Tug!* She winds Tug right round her finger. Mother, I tell you I'm put to it sometimes. I didn't have any such trouble with Bertha-Elizabeth or To-land. I suppose they were naturally good children, but I thought they were good because I made them so."

"Well—Phoebe," Mrs. Martin exclaimed scathingly, "I could have told you you were no disciplinarian."

"I guess you're right, mother. But I simply can't scold them—the things they do are so darling. I try to sometimes, but I always burst out laughing right in the midst of it. That system worked all right with the first two. But what I'm going to do with Phoebe-Girl, I don't know. We have to watch her every blessed minute. If there's one instant of quiet in the house we all get up and hunt her."

"That's exactly the kind of child you were, Phoebe." Mrs. Martin's voice swelled with a note of triumph as if fate had at last avenged certain obscure wrongs.

"It's a judgment on me, then. I told her yesterday that she was so bad I was going to give her away."

"*Well!*" Mrs. Martin exclaimed indignantly, "you know who you can give her to without going a step further."

"Oh, yes, she stipulated that she was to be given to you. In fact, the idea seemed to delight her. Two hours later I found all her clothes—every rag she owns—in the middle of the floor, ready to pack. I spent another half hour putting them away. Oh, it's all right for you to take that superior air, Mrs. Martin, but I don't seem to see you exercising any of your vaunted severity towards your grandchildren. I notice if you're around, when they do anything naughty, you always find some reason why they shouldn't be punished."

Phoebe paused for a moment. Then, "What *are* father and Bertha-Elizabeth doing?" she asked in a baffled tone. "Oh, I know," she added after another perplexed instant, "they're hunting for horse-chestnuts. Do you know, mother, that's my earliest memory about this place—hunting horse-chestnuts. I couldn't have been more than three. I remember how wonderful I thought they were—so glossy and beautiful. I used to hunt them until I had bucketsful. And then I never could think of anything to do with them." Phoebe sighed. "A good deal of life's like that, isn't it? I have always loved our horse-chestnut trees. They're the biggest ones in Maywood. When they budded in the spring, they used to look like candelabras to me. And when the leaves first came out, they were like pointer dogs' paws. And then the wonderful cone-shaped blossoms and then the opening burs. You never let me go off the place until I went to school and I used to think there was an enchanted country on

the other side of the horse-chestnut hedge. I loved the maples too. Why, there was one time when every book I owned was full of pressed maple-leaves. But the color used always to fade out of them." Phoebe sighed again. "That's a little like life, too, isn't it? Oh, I am so glad that my children are going to have the same beautiful memories that I have."

Phoebe seemed to run down. But her gaze lingered on her little daughter, whose eyes, shining with wonder, had fixed themselves on her grandfather's face. Hand in hand, those two still walked among the falling yellow leaves.

"How crazy he is about that child!" Phoebe remarked.

"Not more crazy than he is about the others," Mrs. Martin said quickly.

"Oh, yes, he is," Phoebe insisted. "I know who all the favorites among my children are. You can't fool a mother. Bertha-Elizabeth is his and Sylvia's, Toland is yours and mine, Phoebe-Girl is Tug's and Ern's. But I never saw anything like father. I think he loves Bertha-Elizabeth more than he loved me."

There was a faint note of some strange emotion in Phoebe's blithe tone. Mrs. Martin shot a quick look at her. Then she smiled a little.

"He loves you in her as he loved me in you," she explained.

"I don't remember that he ever played with me for hours at a time." Again there was that little

questioning, wistful note in Phoebe's voice. She stared in a half-grieved way out the window.

Mrs. Martin smiled again. "Sometimes," she began after a pause, "I think men are the most pathetic creatures on earth. All their lives they're looking for something they never find. Women are different. They know right in the beginning they're never going to get it. You take your father. How he loved me! We were all in all to each other until you children came. Then I couldn't do a thing that he wanted me to, it seemed as if. I didn't love him any the less, but you children needed me more—you were so helpless. So many times he wanted me to go places with him evenings and I couldn't because there was no one to stay with you and Ernie. Then he sort of adjusted himself to that, and the first thing I knew, you were all in all to him. He just worshiped the ground you walked on. Then you got married to Tug and stepped out of this house as easy as if you hadn't known your father more than a month. Well, he accommodated himself to that. And now he's putting all his extra affection into little Bertha-Elizabeth. And I suppose some time she'll marry and leave him."

"Of course she will," Phoebe said. "I don't want any old maids in this family. Neither would father. Let me tell you, though, I'm going to administer cyanide of potassium to the girl who marries my son. It's queer—but I simply cannot bear to think of Toland's falling in love. Sometimes I feel as if I were an unnatural parent. It didn't

seem to bother you a bit, mother, when Ern Martin married Sylvia."

Phoebe's eyes were still out the window. Mrs. Martin smiled again. But it was a different smile this time. Perhaps it was not a smile at all, more the ghost of a dead pain.

"There they come now!" Phoebe exclaimed. Mrs. Martin jumped up from her rocker and moved quickly over to the window. Two children turned in at the gate. A curly-headed, snub-nosed, freckled boy in a blue coat with brass buttons, a little gipsy-colored girl in a scarlet, hooded cape and a scarlet cap. They made straight for their grandfather, who received the onslaught with both feet braced.

"Mother Warburton says," Phoebe went on, "that she never in her life saw two people so much alike as Tug and little Toland. She says it's almost uncanny. She's got their two baby pictures framed together."

Mrs. Martin kept silent by a supreme effort. This obsession of Mrs. Warburton's was a great irritation to her. It turned the knife in the wound that Phoebe shared it. It seemed to Mrs. Martin that little Toland's resemblance to his Uncle Ernest and to his grandfather Martin was so apparent as to be little short of comic.

"But I declare, I can't see who Phoebe-Girl takes after," Phoebe went on, "Mrs. Warburton says that she's the image of her mother."

Again Mrs. Martin held a noble peace. Phoebe-Girl's resemblance to Aunt Mary could be proved

by dozens of tintypes and daguerreotypes, by even a faded photograph or two.

Mr. Martin had in the meantime lifted the insistent Phoebe-Girl onto his shoulder. He bore her pig-a-back, at the head of the procession which made toward the house.

"Lord love her!" Phoebe's voice almost broke under its burden of tenderness, "she can be as naughty as she wants—she's the handsomest thing I ever laid my eyes on." The procession wound into the house through the back door. Involuntarily the two women listened to the dialogue coming through the hall.

"But gwampa—evwywhere?" It was Phoebe-Girl's wondering treble.

"Yes, everywhere." It was Mr. Martin's positive bass.

"In the ice-chest, gwampa?"

"Well—yes—I suppose so."

The front of the procession appeared in the doorway. "Mudder," Phoebe-Girl announced radiantly, "God's in the ice-chest."

"Thank goodness, father," Phoebe remarked, "you can answer her questions one day in the week. I haven't any words or ideas left by Sunday."

Mr. Martin seated himself on the couch, Phoebe-Girl still hanging from his shoulders. The other two children threw themselves like a pair of little wolves on their grandmother.

"I've already had a rather exhausting session with Bertha-Elizabeth," Mr. Martin admitted.



"I've explained the sidereal system, molecular energy, and the Darwinian theory."

"Oh, they've just begun to get under way," Phoebe said comfortingly. "Wait until they ask you what's at the other end of space and what happens when time stops. And what there was before anything began and what there'll be when it all ends. And how far the stars reach into space." She stared at the pair of faces, her father's square, twinkling, freshly florid, framed in crisp white hair, her daughter's oval, dimpled, rose-and-snow, emerging from flying masses of jet-black curls. "Not wishing to pry, Mr. Martin, but just as a matter of curiosity, how many mash-notes do you receive a day?"

"I really don't know, Mrs. Warburton," her father replied in kind. "I have engaged one stenographer who does nothing but answer those letters. My orders to her are never to bother me with them. Oh, here comes the rest of the family."

From the path, Sylvia and Ernest waved to the group in the window. Two boys, palpably twins, slim, determined-looking, black-eyed, black-haired little chaps, trotted on ahead.

"Oh, how I wish I had twin boys like Edward and Ernest!" Phoebe said. "Aren't they darlings! And I'd like twin girls, too. And a red-headed baby. And that's all."

The room exploded in another moment into a flurry of greetings. Ernest kissed his mother, sank, with a sigh of relief, into the Morris chair. Phoebe-

Girl immediately climbed into his lap. Bertha-Elizabeth took the place beside her deserted grandfather. The three little boys faded silently in the direction of the barn.

"Uncle Ernest, God's in the coal-bin and the ice-chest," Phoebe-Girl announced triumphantly.

Ernest laughed. "Our family wrestled with the problem of omnipresence two years ago," he commented, "but we still bear the scars."

Ernest had changed more than Phoebe. Much of his boy's *beauté de diable* had gone with his boy's coloring. His face had grown serious in expression: already it had begun to line a little; there were hollows under the eyes. Ernest would be very handsome in the portly forties, but in the tense thirties he looked a little drawn. His smile, however, still brought an extraordinary illumination.

In spite of her two sturdy sons—perhaps because of them—Sylvia still retained her fragility of figure. Her eyes still held their limpid innocent angel's look. Her face was soft and tender. It had begun, very delicately, to fade.

Mrs. Martin seated herself beside her son. "How have the children been, Ernie?"

"Very well—and very bad," Ernest answered. "Mother, if I believed in astrology, I wouldn't dare to have their horoscopes cast. I haven't the nerve to face the truth. Sylvia seems to think they'll escape the electric-chair, though."

"But by a very narrow margin, I'm perfectly willing to admit," Sylvia said. "Yesterday morning

they got at the vacuum-cleaner. They cleaned my dresser of hairpins, side-combs, jewelry, every little thing on it. Oh, it was such a dirty, dusty job getting them back. In the afternoon there was some work I *had* to do. So I tied each of the twins by a long clothes-line to a tree back of the house. I put their toys where they could get them and left them to their fates. It's the first quiet morning I've had since they were born. But I suppose," she added apologetically, "all healthy boys are mischievous, aren't they, mother?"

"Yes—and girls," Mrs. Martin said. "Ernie wasn't a bit worse than Phoebe—not half so bad, I sometimes thought."

Over her mother's head, Phoebe winked at her brother. "Mother," she said in a serious voice, "there's only one criticism I have to bring against you in your maternal capacity and that is the harsh way you've always treated Ern."

"Yes, mother," Ernest agreed solemnly, "I have felt that if you had relieved the severity of your attitude with an occasional kindness, I should have turned out a different man."

Mrs. Martin tried not to smile. "Still, I don't think I indulged you, Ernie."

"Not at all," Mr. Martin came to her rescue. "Far from it! I have always said you were a Spartan mother, Bertha."

"Lila and Will Ellis are coming this afternoon," Phoebe said, "and the Gould twins. I suppose they can marry a hundred times and we'll still call

them the Gould twins. And Fonnies and Molly. Oh, Ern, who do you suppose is coming to visit me next month? Augusta Pugh—Augusta Adams she is now. Her husband's writing a novel and they're going to spend the winter in Italy. I'm delighted to have her."

"I suppose I never shall get over smiling when I think of Gussie Pugh," Ernest remarked. "How I hated that girl. I named a punching-bag after her once."

"Well, you'll get over that just as soon as you see her. She's a crackerjack!" Phoebe exclaimed. "And I'm simply crazy about her husband."

"The Deane boys will be over this afternoon," Ernest went on. "I met them yesterday. Oh—and, Phoebe, who do you suppose is at the Wilders'? Fay Faxon! I came out with her on the train last night. She's been divorced from that man she eloped with. She's resumed her old name. She's awfully faded. In fact, I didn't know her. She had to tell me who she was. I used to think she was a pippin."

"There, there's the dinner-bell," Mr. Martin exclaimed.

"And here's fadder," Phoebe-Girl shouted. She raced into the hall to meet the gentleman whose figure, beginning to swell a little, still displayed all the original athletic outlines of the genial Tug. "Now—don't—break—my—glasses!" came to the group in the parlor between the flurries of Phoebe-Girl's chirping kisses.

Late in the afternoon Mrs. Seaver came over to the Martin house with her daughter. Their arrival was greeted with acclaim.

"Gracie, you bad chicken to go and get engaged when we thought you were still a little girl," said Phoebe, kissing her.

"And where's Ray?" the others chorused.

"He's coming later," Gracie said. She was a tall, slender creature, undeveloped even for her eighteen years. She looked exactly what her mother must have looked at her age. Her dark eyes were too big for her little face. Her dark braids were too heavy for her little head. But there was a soft deliciousness, a kitten-like helplessness about her. When any one addressed her, her cheeks grew pink and her eyes liquid; she seemed to sway in the direction of the voice.

"Isn't it lovely, Mrs. Seaver?" Sylvia asked. But Mrs. Seaver's drooped figure, her dark-rimmed eyes, must have apprised her that, from the mother's point of view, it was far from "lovely." Sylvia rushed on with many swift comments. Mrs. Seaver did not have to answer her question. But as Sylvia talked, she gazed vaguely about.

The big room seemed full of young people. One group chattered about the fireplace in the front room. Another had gathered in a whispered conversation on the couch in the library. Mrs. Seaver's face grew, if possible, more dreary in expression. "Where's your mother, Phoebe?" she asked listlessly.

"Upstairs in the Playroom," Phoebe answered. "Oh, I beg pardon, Mrs. Seaver, I forgot. She told me to tell you to come right up there. Oh, good! Girls, there's Ada Warburton."

Mrs. Seaver climbed the stairs slowly. A gay clatter and chatter of happy youth followed her. As she turned the second stairway, the walls seemed to shut it off. From above came to take its place another noise, a low, steady murmur. Mrs. Seaver paused in the doorway.

The big room had changed in the course of its history from nursery to playroom, from gymnasium to dance-hall. Now it had reverted to type—it was nursery again. Low shelves, everywhere, held books and toys. Above them, a modern landscape paper showed incidents in the old-fashioned fairy tales. Kindergarten tables and chairs filled the center. Cot-beds occupied three of the corners.

At one end of the room, in front of the fireplace, sat Mr. Martin. It was his voice that had made the murmur; he was reading aloud to an attentive little audience. The three boys—Phoebe's Toland and Ernest's twins—sat grouped about him. Bertha-Elizabeth lay in his lap, her head on his shoulder. Her soft fine hair, straight except where, at the ends, it turned upward in a golden ripple, sprayed against his black coat like a shower of fairy rain. Her lids had fallen half over her deep eyes, but their look had set itself far off as though she saw the tale enacting itself outside the window. One of Mr. Martin's hands held his book but the

other clasped Bertha Elizabeth's pipe-stem fingers.

At the further end of the room rocked Mrs. Martin. Beside her, working with water-colors at a little table, Phoebe-Girl colored the Scriptural picture which she had brought from Sunday-school.

"Oh, Mrs. Seaver, there you are!" Mrs. Martin said in a tone, half welcome, half relief. "Come right over here where we can talk. I've got something to tell you. Land, Phoebe seems to find Phoebe-Girl so much trouble. She's been as good as a kitten ever since we came up here. It's a knack, this managing children. But, Lord, I suppose we all have to learn by experience. And I must say Phoebe does very well. Her children are all healthy—and that's the main thing. Some of the things she does sound strange to me—but I don't know as there's any harm in them. She lets them sing kindergarten songs between the courses at the table, for instance. She says it keeps them in their seats better than anything she can think of. Gracie come over?"

"Yes."

"And Ray?"

"He's coming later." From Mrs. Seaver's tone, it was again evident that her dejection had not lessened since the morning.

For a moment Mrs. Martin was silent.

From the other end of the room came a piping clamor of approval.

"That was a nice story, grandpa!" "Read us another, grandpa!" "Read one about a wild tiger,

grandpa!" "Read one about a flying-machine, grandpa!" And, finally, in Bertha-Elizabeth's soft tone, "*Tell* us a story, grandpa. I like your truly-own stories better."

"All right," agreed Mr. Martin. "I'll tell you one more. But, remember, this will be the last. *Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, there lived in a land very far distant from here——*"

"Mrs. Seaver," Mrs. Martin said in a low tone, "I have been thinking over what you told me this morning, ever since you went home. It's sort of haunted me. And I've made up my mind that I'd tell you something that I've never talked over with any living creature except Edward. It seemed to me that my experience might help you a little. You remember you were saying to-day that you were afraid you wouldn't be able to keep up with Gracie's set and that you'd sort of fall behind and grow rusty and get to feel out of it."

Mrs. Seaver nodded. Her eyes filled as they went from Phoebe-Girl's flying, paint-stained fingers to Mrs. Martin's face.

"Well, that's exactly how I felt for a while after our two children were married. There's no use in talking, the young generation is always different from the old one. I remember how much talk there was in my family at some of the things Edward and I did when we were first married. Everybody thought we were going into bankruptcy because, according to North Campion ideas, we didn't save enough money. Well, I couldn't help feeling a little



that way about Phoebe. It seemed to me she was awful extravagant—two maids in the house and a nurse for Bertha-Elizabeth. And insisting on their wearing black suits and white caps. And always having her meals in courses and giving such elaborate dinner-parties. But, as Edward said, why shouldn't they if they could afford it? Then Ernest got married, and though he and Sylvia started in much more modestly than Phoebe and Tug, still they had far more to do with than Edward and I had at first. And Sylvia was so clever—she makes two dollars do the work of one. She's much more economical than Phoebe. And such a good housekeeper. Well, perhaps you remember how she kept the twins when they were babies—neat as a pin. Then Ernest began to go right ahead. Edward's very proud of the progress he's made—although I say, and I shall always maintain it, he works altogether *too hard*. Then they moved from their little flat into the house they're in now. Gradually they fixed it all up. They began to entertain, too. Tug and Ernest both say you have to entertain in business nowadays. Why, if any of Tug's friends come on from the New York office, Phoebe gives them a dinner the moment they get here. She says she looks upon it as one of her regular household expenses."

"*But, although nobody saw her, the wicked fairy was present all the time,*" came Mr. Martin's voice. "*And suddenly she advanced and said in a cruel voice, 'Although I have not been invited to the*

*christening, I, too, have a gift for the baby princess.' "*

" Well, at first, we went to all the dinners they gave. But, somehow—I don't know how it was—we didn't seem to fit in with all those young people. In the first place, it bores Edward to get into a dress-suit so often. He works very hard in the office and when he comes home he likes to relax. It's queer—Tug and Ernest don't seem to mind it at all. Phoebe says it's a matter of habit. Tug gets home on an early train, takes his bath, and dresses for dinner every night. He says it refreshes him. But Edward doesn't see it that way. And then I had to have so many new clothes. But the worst of it was that, with all the company, we didn't really have a chance to talk to the children. As for the grandchildren, they were always in bed. There came a time when we didn't seem to see any of them except in a haphazard way. It wasn't as if Phoebe and Ernie were tied down by their children. They weren't. Young folks aren't nowadays. They've always had a maid to stay with them nights when they went out. No, it was more that they were *going* all the time. You know they're in with that young married set that lives down round Murray's Corner and they have very gay times."

*" The poor little princess' hands began to grow and grow and grow. Pretty soon they were as big as bread-and-butter plates, then they were as big as soup plates, then they were as big as platters. But they stopped there. The poor queen almost*

*cried her pretty eyes out, she was so ashamed. Nobody was ever allowed to see the princess. They kept her hidden safely away in the Secret Garden."*

"Well, Edward and I talked it over. We said we were too old to keep up with *all* the ways of the new generation, but if we didn't keep up with *some* of them, it would pass us by. We made up our minds to work up some scheme by which we should see the children in peace and comfort at least once a week. It was Edward who thought of this one—that the two families should come here every Sunday for all day. And that's what they do now, week in and week out. Phoebe and Ernie get here early and the children come from Sunday-school. Everybody in Maywood knows that they're here and every Sunday they come dropping in during the afternoon and evening. I let both the maids go—so there's no complaint there. But I always have plenty of cold meat, a big salad, and a freezer-full of ice cream. And anything else they want—hot biscuits or rabbit or fudge—they can cook themselves. Well, it's worked like a charm. In the afternoon Phoebe and Sylvia and Ernie and Tug stay downstairs and visit with their friends—and Edward and I come up here with the children. They have their supper here and I put them to bed. And then Edward and I have supper and spend the evenings with the young folks. Well, I can't tell you how much I enjoy it and Edward Martin's grown ten years younger. That was what I dreaded most about the children marrying—it would take all the

young company out of the house. But you see now we've got it back again."

*"And there, under the huge rock, lay a wonderful box of carved gold. The Handsome Young Prince seized it eagerly. It opened at a touch. As the cover lifted, there came from it an odor of wild-roses and violets and honeysuckles and new-mown hay. He saw that it was filled with a soft transparent fluid like a melted moonstone. It was the Magic Ointment."*

"But after all, that isn't the best of it, Mrs. Seaver," Mrs. Martin said solemnly. "The best thing is that we've found our own children again in our grandchildren. I can't tell you how I hated to have Phoebe and Ernie grow up—and yet I wanted them to grow up, too. But you know how a mother is. Every period of a child's life is so sweet you'd like to keep them that way forever. But you can't. Life is kinder than we think though, for just as it took our children away from us, it brought them back. Sometimes I feel as if we were living it all over again. I can't tell you how many times on Sunday afternoons, Edward has looked over to me and said, 'I should think that was Phoebe,' or 'Doesn't that sound like Ernest?' It's as if we had all we've ever had and a great deal more besides. For, instead of two, we've got five. Now, Mrs. Seaver, that's what you've got to do if you want to keep Gracie and her children. Make it so easy and happy for her to come home that she'd rather do that than go anywhere else."

"I guess you're right, Mrs. Martin," Mrs. Seaver said tremulously. "Anyway, I'm going to try it. I do thank you for telling me. I guess——"

"Well, chicks! Supper!" Phoebe's gay voice interrupted from the stairs. She appeared in the doorway, carrying a tray covered with pitchers of milk, glasses, piles of bread. "It's time for little folks to eat and go to bed. How's mother's lamb-baby been?" she inquired fondly of Phoebe-Girl.

"Very quiet," Mrs. Martin said triumphantly, "not a bit of trouble. My *land!*" For the delighted Phoebe-Girl stood up, revealing that she had painted with vivid scarlet every button and every bit of white piqué that trimmed her little green gingham frock.

"Oh, what a naughty, naughty little girl!" Phoebe exclaimed. "What am I going to do with you?" Phoebe-Girl dimpled but visibly repudiated all responsibility in this problem. "Well, I can't scold you to-night. Grandma says that mother was just exactly as naughty when she was a little girl. Besides, it will all wash out." Phoebe began to set one of the little tables.

"*And so,*" Mr. Martin concluded rapidly, "*they lived happily ever afterward.*"









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